THE ROVER BOYS AT BIG BEAR LAKE

THE SECOND ROVER BOYS SERIES

FOR YOUNG AMERICANS

By ARTHUR M. WINFIELD

BANG! CRACK! BANG! WENT THE GUNS THE BOYS CARRIED.
The Rover Boys at Big Bear Lake. *Frontispiece*—(*Page* 293)

THE ROVER BOYS AT BIG BEAR LAKE

OR

THE CAMPS OF THE RIVAL CADETS

BY

ARTHUR M. WINFIELD
(Edward Stratemeyer)

AUTHOR OF "THE ROVER BOYS AT SCHOOL," "THE ROVER BOYS ON LAND AND SEA," "THE ROVER BOYS AT COLBY HALL," "THE PUTNAM HALL CADET SERIES," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK
GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS

Made in the United States of America

Books by Arthur M. Winfield
(Edward Stratemeyer)

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THE ROVER BOYS AT SCHOOL
THE ROVER BOYS ON THE OCEAN
THE ROVER BOYS IN THE JUNGLE
THE ROVER BOYS OUT WEST
THE ROVER BOYS ON THE GREAT LAKES
THE ROVER BOYS IN THE MOUNTAINS
THE ROVER BOYS IN CAMP
THE ROVER BOYS ON LAND AND SEA
THE ROVER BOYS ON THE RIVER
THE ROVER BOYS ON THE PLAINS
THE ROVER BOYS IN SOUTHERN WATERS
THE ROVER BOYS ON THE FARM
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12mo. Cloth. Illustrated.

Grosset & Dunlap, Publishers, New York

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The Rover Boys at Big Bear Lake

INTRODUCTION

My Dear Boys: This book is a complete story in itself, but forms the seventh volume in a line issued under the general title, "The Second Rover Boys Series for Young Americans."

As told in some volumes of the First Series, this line of books was started years ago with the publication of "The Rover Boys at School," "On the Ocean," and "In the Jungle," in which I introduced my readers to Dick, Tom and Sam Rover and their chums and relatives. The First Series, consisting of twenty volumes, gave the particulars of what happened to these three Rover boys while attending Putnam Hall Military Academy, Brill College, and while on numerous outings in this country and abroad. Having finished their education, the three young men established themselves in business and became married. Later Dick Rover was blessed with a son and a daughter, as was also his brother Sam, while the fun-loving Tom became the father of a pair of lively twin boys.

From their homes in New York City the four Rover boys were sent to a boarding school, as related in the first volume of the Second Series, entitled "The Rover Boys at Colby Hall," where

they made many friends, also a few enemies. From that school the scene was shifted to "Snowshoe Island," where the boys spent a winter outing, and then they rejoined their fellow cadets in some strenuous happenings while "Under Canvas." Then in "The Rover Boys on a Hunt" they uncovered the mystery surrounding a lonely house in the woods.

The older Rovers had become interested in oil, and in the next volume, entitled "The Rover Boys in the Land of Luck," I related how the lads went to Texas and Oklahoma. Then one of their chums asked them to take a vacation in the West, and in the volume preceding this and called "At Big Horn Ranch" they had the time of their lives.

In the present story the scene is shifted back to Colby Hall and then to some rival camps on the edge of a big lake. What happened to the boys I will leave the pages which follow to relate.

As many of my readers know, the sale of this line of books has now passed the *three million* mark. To me this is as wonderful as it is pleasing. I earnestly hope that the reading of these volumes will do all of the boys and girls good.

Affectionately and sincerely yours,

EDWARD STRATEMEYER.

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THE ROVER BOYS AT BIG BEAR LAKE

CHAPTER I

ON THE LAKE

"It's great, I'll say!" declared Randy Rover.

"I should say it was!" returned his twin brother, Andy. "Just think of swooping through the air like a bird! Gee, I'd like to own a flying machine myself!"

"Well, our fathers owned one once," declared Captain Fred Rover, somewhat proudly. "They flew clear to Brill College in their machine."

"Yes, I've often heard them talk about that," put in Major Jack Rover. "They called the machine the *Dartaway*. It was a biplane and of rather primitive construction, because in those days aeroplanes were a new invention and the best of them were rather crude."

"I wonder what ever became of that machine?" questioned Andy.

"Oh, it went into the scrap heap long ago," declared his cousin Fred.

"They didn't have much use for it after they left college and went into business in Wall Street," explained Jack. "But they certainly had some dandy times in it."

The four boys were out on Clearwater Lake in one of the rowboats belonging to Colby Hall. They had been watching the maneuvers of a large biplane which had circled over their heads several times. This biplane had made its headquarters at a cove just below Haven Point, and its owners had advertised far and wide to take people up for a fly around the lake for fifteen dollars per person. As this was the first aeroplane to come to the lake for business, it had taken up quite a few people during the past ten days.

"I wonder how long they stay up on a trip," remarked Andy, as the four boys resumed their rowing.

"The circulars say fifteen minutes," answered Fred.

"It didn't seem to me he stayed up more than ten minutes the time before this," said Jack. "I suppose they cut the time when they have other people waiting to go up. They carry only two passengers at a time, you know, and I suppose they want to make hay while the sun shines."

"A dollar a minute is making money pretty

fast," observed Randy. "I'd like to rake in an iron man every sixty seconds by the watch," and he grinned.

"Yes, but it costs something to run a flying machine," returned Jack. "And then there is the risk, too."

"Well, if we went up it would cost the four of us sixty dollars," declared Randy.

"And I don't see ourselves spending sixty dollars that way just now," cried Jack. "My spending money for this quarter is getting low."

"Don't say a word, Jack, about spending money!" came from his cousin Fred, with a wry face. "I'm almost high and dry."

"It's lucky they can't charge us for looking at the aeroplane," chuckled Andy.

The four Rover boys had left Colby Hall about an hour before for a row down the Rick Rack River to the lake. In a boat behind them were four of their chums, Dick Powell, often called Spouter because of his fondness for making long speeches, Gif Garrison, who was at the head of the school athletics, and Ned Lowe and Dan Soppinger. Each crowd of cadets was in a well-built four-oared boat, and a little while before had indulged in a race which had come to an end when all had stopped rowing to look at the aeroplane which was soaring above their heads.

Boating that year promised to become popular at Colby Hall. Colonel Colby had had the institution fitted out with several new racing shells, and in addition had purchased two motor-boats of which all the cadets were very proud. A man had been hired who knew all about motor-boats, and he was instructing the various cadets in the use of the craft.

"I must say I wish we were out in one of the new motor-boats," declared Fred, after they had gone on rowing for ten minutes more. "This is rather hot and tiresome work."

"Never mind, Fred. You need the exercise," declared Jack. "You're getting too stout. The first thing you know you'll be as fat as Fatty Hendry."

"Gosh! don't say that, Jack," returned the young captain quickly. "Why, Fatty is so fat he can hardly get through the dormitory doors!"

"That aviator won't want to take up Fatty," remarked Andy. "That is, not unless he went up alone and paid double fare."

"Hi, you fellows, get a move on!" came a shout from the other rowboat, and Gif Garrison waved a hand towards the Rovers. "I thought you were going to do a little rowing practice. Remember, we have got to get busy if we want to win any of those boat races later on."

"Fred and I are not in those races, Gif," answered Jack. "You know officers are not expected to enter any contests like that."

"Yes, but I expect Andy and Randy to go into at least one race," declared the cadet who was at the head of the athletic committee. "And when they go in I want them to make a real showing for Colby."

"We'll do that all right enough," declared Randy.

"I'm going in for practice every day after this," answered his brother.

"Just remember we've got to wipe Longley Academy from the face of the lake," declared Spouter Powell. "We'll show them that as a military academy they are not one, two, three with good old Colby Hall."

"That's the talk!" cried Jack. "There's going to be only one real military academy around here, and that's Colby."

"So say we all of us!" sang out his cousin Andy.

"What did they want to turn Longley Academy into a military school for, anyway?" grumbled Ned Lowe. "I thought when they started that school they were going to give their attention mainly to athletics."

"So they did," answered Gif Garrison. "But

when they saw how popular Colby Hall was becoming, and how they were losing one scholar after another, I guess the owners got busy and concluded the only thing they could do would be to turn the academy into a military school and give their boys the showiest kind of a uniform."

"And they sure have got the uniforms!" declared Fred, who overheard this remark from the other boat. "Gosh! you would think they were cadets from one of those little jerkwater monarchies in Europe. Such gold braid and buttons and such lace! It's enough to make an ordinary American boy sick!"

"You'd better not tell them that," said Jack quickly. "If you do they'll say you're jealous of them because our uniforms are so ordinary."

"Well, you give me the good old gray and khaki every time," came from Randy. "Both of those colors stand the wear a good deal better than that showy stuff will ever do."

"Come on, fellows; jack her up!" called out Gif. "I'll bet you a pint of peanuts we can beat you to the landing at Berry Island."

"Make it a quart and we'll go you!" shouted back Jack gayly.

"And they've got to be freshly roasted, too," broke in Andy. "No stale old goobers from

Rigoletto's place where they've been lying in his show window for a month or two! They've got to be freshly roasted, right out of the whistling roaster!"

"Get ready—pull!" cried Gif, a few seconds later, and at this word of command from the head of the general athletic committee the four Rovers started up the lake with the other boat close by their side.

It was a beautiful day in early summer, and the surface of Clearwater Lake sparkled in the sunshine. There was scarcely any wind and consequently conditions were ideal for rowing.

Ever since they had come to the military academy the four Rover boys had spent more or less time on the river and the lake beyond, so they were no novices when it came to handling an oar. Jack set the pace, and his three cousins kept stroke with him in a fashion that could not help but win approval.

"Come on, fellows! We've got to beat 'em!" cried Gif Garrison to his rowing mates. "Pull now, and make every stroke tell!"

"We are not as well matched up as they are," panted Ned Lowe, who was by far the poorest rower of the bunch. "Those Rovers have been rowing together ever since they came to the Hall."

"Don't growl, Ned! Row!" returned the leader, and then the cadets in the second boat did their best to outstrip their rivals.

It was certainly a spirited race and well worth watching. But no other craft was in sight, the two rowboats apparently having that portion of the lake entirely to themselves. The aeroplane which had attracted the rowers' attention had glided away in the distance and they could no longer hear the roar of the motor.

Berry Island was little more than a quarter of a mile away. It was for the most part very rocky, but at one end there was a somewhat sandy beach where the boys occasionally went in bathing.

"Say, it wouldn't be a bad stunt to go in swimming after this race," puffed Randy, as he bent over his oar.

"No use to go in when you're all tired out and in a sweat," declared Fred, who on account of his stoutness found it rather difficult to keep up with the others.

The Rovers had forged ahead, and it looked very much as if they would win the race when suddenly Randy began to drag. Then he lost his stroke and that threw his brother out of stroke, too, and this caused the rowboat to swerve from

its course and the craft under Gif Garrison's directions shot ahead.

"Hi! what's the matter with you?" cried Jack, in some vexation.

"My oar caught on a rope or some bit of seaweed," declared Randy. "It's gone now," and he and his brother proceeded to right themselves. Then they caught the stroke and went forward as before.

This little mishap occupied only a few seconds of time, but during that period the other boat went ahead a good hundred feet. Gif and his followers were rowing with all their might, bound to put all the distance possible between themselves and their competitors.

"Swing into it! Swing!" cried Jack. "We've got to catch up! Now then—all together and make her jump out of the water!"

Jack had always been the leader of the four cousins, and they obeyed his instructions as best they could. They put in every ounce of their strength on the oars, and slowly but surely their craft began to overtake the other rowboat.

"Pull, you duffers, pull!" cried Gif, as he saw the Rovers crawling up. "We're almost to the island! Pull, or they'll overtake us!"

He increased the stroke and Spouter and Dan

followed. But this speed was too great for poor Ned Lowe, and all of a sudden Ned's oar came up with a tremendous splash that showered everybody in the boat with water. Then Ned lost his balance and he and Spouter came close to falling overboard. The craft slued around directly in the path of the second rowboat.

"Stop rowing! Back water!" cried Jack, as the sudden shouts ahead warned him that something was wrong. He gave a quick glance around, as did his oar mates, and then he and Fred threw their craft out of the course. An instant later the oars of the boats scraped each other. But then the craft separated.

"Some narrow escape, I'll say," declared Randy, when the momentary danger was over.

"What's the matter with you fellows, anyway?" called out Fred.

"Ned lost his stroke, that's all," answered Gif.

"Lost his stroke and gave us a shower bath at the same time," put in Dan.

"Well, I guess the race is off," declared Jack, good-naturedly. "Anyway, I think it's about time that we got back to the Hall. I want to see Captain Dale before we have the evening parade."

"Let's rest at the island just a few minutes," pleaded Randy. "I want to get my wind back

before—— Gee, boys, look at that, will you?"

He broke off suddenly and in his excitement stood up in the rowboat pointing skyward as he did so. All looked in the direction pointed out and saw that the aeroplane was again heading in their direction. But now instead of sailing along on an even keel the flying craft was zigzagging in a most unusual fashion.

"Say! there's something wrong with that flying machine, that's sure," declared Fred in excitement.

"Maybe the aviator is trying a few stunts," suggested Andy. "They do that once in a while, you know."

"But not when they have passengers who are green at flying!" burst out Jack. "I believe something is wrong with that machine."

"Look! Look! Did you ever see anything like that?" came from the other boat. "That aviator acts as if he were crazy! Or otherwise his machine has got the jimjams."

By this time the aeroplane was almost over their heads. The roar of the motor was deafening. The great machine darted from one side to the other, and then took a dip and a whirl which made it look as if both rowboats and their occupants might be doomed.

CHAPTER II

ABOUT THE ROVER BOYS

"Look out!"

"We're going to be smashed!"

"That fellow must be crazy!"

Such were some of the cries coming from the Rover boys and their chums as the big aeroplane swooped around from one side to another almost over their heads.

It was a truly perilous moment, and no one realized it more than did the Rovers. And what to do not a one of them knew. To attempt to row out of the way might prove the worst move of all, for it might bring them directly to the spot where the aeroplane would come crashing down.

"Let's dive overboard," suggested Fred. "Go down as deep as you can!" he yelled.

This seemed good advice and some of the lads were on the point of following it when suddenly the aeroplane made another swoop and struck the surface of the lake some distance away. It sent

the water flying in every direction, some of the drops even reaching the cadets. The propeller gave a snap and one blade went whizzing up into the sky to come down on the other side of Berry Island. Then the flying machine began slowly to settle and the motor stopped abruptly.

"Help! Help! Save us!" came in a girlish voice across the water. "Save us!"

"Look! Look!" exclaimed Jack, springing suddenly to his feet. "Unless I'm mistaken, that is Ruth Stevenson!"

"It is Ruth, just as sure as you're born!" declared Fred. "And a man and the aviator are with her!"

"That man must be her father," went on Jack. "She said he was going to call at Clearwater Hall to see her. Come on, boys! We've got to get to them before the aeroplane pulls them under. Hurry! Row for all you're worth!"

As he uttered the last words Jack sank down on the seat and grasped tight hold of the oar which had almost gotten away from him in his excitement. The others also fell to rowing, and away they pulled for the sinking aeroplane which was less than two hundred feet away. Soon the other rowboat followed.

And while the four Rover boys and their chums are going to the rescue of those in peril,

it may be as well for me to state as briefly as possible who the boys were and how they came to be in their present situation. Of course, those who have read the previous volumes of this series will need no special introduction to the Rovers, and they can skip these pages if they so desire.

In the first volume of the line, entitled "The Rover Boys at School," I introduced three brothers, Dick, Tom and Sam Rover and told how they were sent to Putnam Hall Military Academy where they had a number of adventures and where they made great friends of three other students, Larry Colby, Songbird Powell, and Fred Garrison.

Passing from Putnam Hall, these three brothers next attended Brill College, and then went into business in New York City by organizing The Rover Company with offices on Wall Street.

During their schoolboy days the three lads had made the acquaintanceship of three nice girls, Dora Stanhope and her cousins Nellie and Grace Laning. Shortly after the three couples were married and settled down in connecting houses on Riverside Drive, New York City. As the result of his marriage Dick Rover became the father of a son, Jack, and a daughter named Martha. Sam Rover was blessed with a girl called Mary, and then a son who was christened Fred. At

about this same time Tom Rover's wife, Nellie, came forward with a lively pair of twin boys, who were named Anderson and Randolph after their grandfather and their great-uncle. Andy and Randy, as they were always called, were full of fun, coming naturally by this, as their father had been as full of life as any lad could well be.

Being brought up side by side, the younger generation of Rover boys, as well as the girls, lived together very much as one large family. But soon the boys began to cut up to such an extent that it was decided to send them to some strict boarding school.

About that time Larry Colby, the chum of the older Rovers, had opened Colby Hall, a military academy patterned somewhat after the national institution at West Point. This was considered just the institution for the younger generation, and in the first volume of the Second Series, entitled "The Rover Boys at Colby Hall," I related how Jack, Fred and Andy and Randy journeyed to that institution of learning and how they made a number of warm friends and also defeated several of their enemies.

The military school was located about half a mile from Haven Point, a small town on Clearwater Lake close to where the Rick Rack River ran into that body of water. The school con-

sisted of a large stone building facing the river and close by was a smaller building occupied by Colonel Colby and his family and some of the professors, and not far away were a gymnasium, a boathouse, and several necessary buildings.

On arriving at Colby Hall the four Rovers found several of their friends already there, including Spouter Powell and Gif Garrison, the sons of their fathers' old classmates.

Up the lake on the other side of Haven Point was located Clearwater Hall, a boarding school for girls. During a panic in a moving picture theater the four Rover boys became acquainted with several girls from this school, including Ruth Stevenson and May Powell, a cousin of Spouter. Later on Mary and Martha Rover became pupils at the girls' school, and all of the young folks got to be warm friends.

After a term at Colby Hall the four Rover boys had the pleasure of spending the winter holidays on "Snowshoe Island." Then a little later they went "Under Canvas" with their fellow cadets, and later still went on a grand hunt, using a bungalow up in the woods which belonged to Gif Garrison's uncle. This was during the great World War and when the older Rovers had all gone to France to fight for democracy.

The return of the older Rovers brought a sur-

prise. Dick Rover had saved the life of a man from Texas and in return had received a deed to some land which later on was supposed to contain oil. Dick decided to go to Texas and Oklahoma, and the four boys begged to go with him. And they had some stirring adventures in what has so often been called "The Land of Luck."

After their adventures in the Southwest the four boys returned again to Colby Hall. At this time Jack was captain of Company C and Fred was a lieutenant in the same command.

There was a spirited rivalry when a new election for officers was held. But in spite of many efforts made to defeat them, Jack was chosen major of the school battalion and Fred was made captain of Company C. Andy and Randy might have held minor offices, but both preferred to remain privates, especially as that would enable them to take part in the various athletic exercises. At first Colonel Colby had allowed the cadets to join the baseball nine, football eleven, and the rowing teams, even though they were officers. But there had been some grumbling that "some cadets were trying to do everything and would not give the others a show," and so it had been decided that while all cadets were supposed to go in for athletics in general, they could not

be officers and take part in any official athletic contests.

During this term at school Spouter asked the Rovers and Gif Garrison to spend the summer vacation with him out in Montana on a ranch owned by his father. How the Rovers went out there with their chums and what stirring times they encountered have been related in the volume preceding this, entitled "The Rover Boys at Big Horn Ranch." In that book they exposed the acts of one of their enemies, Brassy Bangs, and also brought a number of horse thieves to justice.

"We have certainly had some strenuous times here," remarked Jack, one day.

"I suppose it will be dead quiet for us this winter when we return to Colby Hall," his cousin Randy had answered.

"Well, that will give us a chance to catch up in our studies," Fred had suggested. "We don't want to fall behind. If we do, our folks may take us away from Colby Hall."

"Oh, we don't want to leave that place—at least, not just yet!" Andy had put in hastily.

The winter had passed rather quietly, the boys going home only for the Christmas holidays. During that time there had come only one surprise, and that was the news concerning Longley Academy. This institution of learning, which

had been in existence only a short time, had been devoted very largely to physical culture and athletics and had an extra fine baseball grounds with a beautiful grandstand and bleachers. But strange to say, the athletics had not been as prosperous as the management of the institution wished, and a good many of the pupils had been on the point of leaving, and several had applied for admission to Colby Hall.

As a consequence of this the owners of Longley had turned the academy into a military school with a section devoted to horsemanship. The cadets were given a most striking uniform, and everything possible was done to induce the cadets of Colby Hall to shift to the other institution.

"And I call that about as mean a piece of business as could happen," was Jack's comment, in talking this over with some of his chums. "Of course they have a perfect right to make a military academy of Longley if they want to; but they have no right to steal away our cadets."

Among the boys to leave Colby Hall and go to Longley were Paul Halliday and Billy Sands, who had been great chums of Brassy Bangs while that individual was a cadet. Of course, Colonel Colby was sorry to have any of his pupils leave him, but the Rovers were rather glad to see Halliday and Sands go.

"It's good riddance to those fellows!" Fred had remarked. "I never considered either of them much better than Brassy Bangs himself."

"Oh, I don't think Halliday and Sands are quite as bad as Bangs was," Randy had answered. "Still I'd rather have them somewhere else than here."

During the winter the cadets of Colby and the boys at Longley had had several contests on the ice and had also indulged in several snowball fights. In one of these fights Fred had received a black eye from a snowball hurled by Billy Sands. In return for this Sands had been caught a little later and rolled down into a snowy hollow, much to his disgust. In one of the skating races Paul Halliday had come in ahead of two of the cadets from Colby, and because of this he and the other cadets from Longley had done considerable crowing.

"We'll show Colby where they get off!" had come boastfully from Tommy Flanders, a youth who on several occasions had pitched for the rival school.

"You'll never show Colby anything!" Jack had retorted, and this had made Tommy Flanders very angry, because he had been virtually "batted out of the box" by the Colby baseball nine.

As a result of the new order of things a more bitter rivalry than ever had sprung up between Colby Hall and Longley Academy, and when the winter was at an end and there were talks of some boat races everybody was wondering how the matches would terminate. The Colbyites hoped that they might win, while the Longley supporters went around everywhere declaring that they "would wipe up the lake" with their rivals.

This was the condition of affairs when the four Rovers had gone out on the afternoon of this bright day in early summer for a row on Clearwater Lake. They had been talking about the boys at Longley Academy when their attention had been attracted to the aeroplane, as mentioned at the beginning of this story.

The flying machine was one belonging to an aero corporation which sent aeroplanes to many summer resorts where they might be used by visitors and others. Each was supposed to be in first-class condition and under the care of an experienced aviator.

At first it was supposed that the aviator would be able to get but little patronage at Haven Point for the reason that the town was small and the district sparsely settled. But it was soon found that, by skillful advertising, the flying machine

drew a great many visitors to the lake; and sometimes the aviator was called on to make a dozen or more trips a day.

As he usually carried two passengers and as the fare was fifteen dollars per person, it can readily be seen that the business was a prosperous one. The local paper had devoted several columns to the enterprise, giving the personal experience of a number of people who had made a flight. So far nothing in the way of an accident had occurred to mar the success of the undertaking.

But now in the twinkling of an eye all this was changed. For some reason as yet unknown the huge flying machine had struck the bosom of the lake in slanting fashion and one of the blades of the propeller had been broken off to fly into space. And now the aeroplane was on the point of sinking, carrying the aviator and his two passengers with it.

CHAPTER III

THE RESCUE FROM THE BIPLANE

"I WONDER if they are strapped to the seats of that biplane?"

"More than likely. They usually strap themselves and their passengers fast to keep from falling out."

"If they can't loosen the straps they'll surely be drowned."

"Come on, fellows, row for all you're worth! A second gained may mean a life!" yelled Jack.

"Say, wasn't that Ruth Stevenson?" came from the second boat.

"Yes," answered Fred. "Hurry up! We've got to save them!"

All this conversation came in jerks, for every cadet was working frantically at his oar in a mad endeavor to reach the sinking aeroplane. They were almost up to the spot when they heard a queer gurgle and suddenly the big flying machine slid from view under the surface of the lake.

"It's going down!" cried Randy, glancing hastily around.

By this time the first rowboat had reached the scene of the accident and all of the boys threw down their oars to get a better view of the situation. The water was much disturbed, and in the foam created by the disappearing flying machine could be seen two men struggling, one with some sort of strap fastened around him.

"Help! Help! I can't swim!" cried one of the men, and Jack recognized Mr. Stevenson's voice.

"Help! I'm being pulled down! Help!" gasped the aviator.

"Go after him, fellows! I'm going after Mr. Stevenson!" called out Randy, and immediately leaped overboard, followed by his brother.

"Where is Ruth?" questioned Jack anxiously, for the girl from Clearwater Hall was one of his dearest friends.

He had scarcely spoken when he saw an arm appear a short distance away. Then Ruth's head bobbed up and the girl uttered another cry.

"Help me! I can't move my feet! Help me!"

By this time the second boat was close at hand and a glance showed Jack and Fred that the aviator was already clambering on board. Another glance showed Randy and Andy supporting Mr. Stevenson.

"I'm coming, Ruth! Keep up!" cried Jack, and leaping to the bow of the rowboat he made a quick, slanting dive overboard which brought him within a few feet of where the girl was floundering. He knew that Ruth was a fair swimmer and realized that something must be radically wrong if she could not keep herself afloat.

"Oh, Jack! Jack! Is that you?" gasped the girl. "Help me! My feet are all tangled up!"

"I'm coming, Ruth," he reassured her. And then he yelled back to his cousin: "Fred, bring the boat up here, quick!"

The stout young Rover hastened to comply, and while he was doing this Jack continued to swim swiftly towards the hapless girl. He caught hold of Ruth's arm just as she was about to go down a second time.

"Grab hold, Ruth. I'll support you," he said. "What is holding you?"

"I don't know. A strap, I guess. I had one around me and it loosened and slipped to my knees."

"Just hang over my shoulders and you'll be all right," answered the young major. "I was afraid you had been hurt."

"But, Jack! I can't move my feet at all!"

"Never mind. We'll soon have you on board the boat."

"Where is daddy?"

"Andy and Randy went for him. I'm sure they'll save him. We've got two boats here, and four cadets in each; so there is plenty of assistance at hand."

At that instant Fred came alongside with the boat and it was the work of but a few seconds to place the dripping girl aboard. Then Jack followed. As Ruth had said, a strap had become tangled around her knees, but this was now disposed of.

In the meantime Andy and Randy had reached Mr. Stevenson, and with something of an effort they managed to get that gentleman over to the vicinity of the second boat. Ruth's father was somewhat excited, and this was but natural. He could not swim, and, moreover, he had received a blow in the side which pained him considerably.

"My daughter? Where is my daughter?" he questioned as soon as he had hold of the side of the boat.

"Jack and Fred went after her," answered Spouter. "There they are, over yonder. Jack is supporting her."

"Thank heaven then she isn't drowned!" said

Mr. Stevenson, shuddering. "I'd have gone after her myself; but what can a man do if he can't swim? After this I'll advocate that every boy and girl be forced to learn to swim," he added, with emphasis.

"Either that or keep away from the water," returned Andy grimly.

"Oh, Jack, what a terrible experience!" came from Ruth, when she could regain her breath. "I thought surely I was going down to the bottom of the lake. And how good of you to come to my aid!"

"You don't suppose I was going to let you drown, Ruth?" he answered quickly.

"I have to thank you too, Fred," went on the girl.

"Oh, I didn't do so much," answered the stout Rover modestly. "It's mighty lucky we happened to be in this vicinity," he went on.

"And just to think I was going to surprise you, Jack!" continued Ruth.

"Surprise me?"

"Yes. By sending you a picture of daddy and me in the aeroplane. You see, my father came to Haven Point last night and called on me this morning, and he happened to know the men who are running the aero corporation. So when I begged him to take me up he agreed and we had

our photographs taken just when we started." She paused and gave a sudden shiver. "Oh, if daddy had been drowned, what would I have done!"

A little later the two boats came together and Mr. Stevenson joined his daughter in the craft manned by the Rovers.

"I scraped my side on the machine when we came down so suddenly," explained Ruth's father. "It hurts me yet. I think I'll see a doctor about it when I go ashore. I must have scraped the skin pretty hard, if nothing more," and he winced.

"We'll row for Haven Point right away," answered Jack.

"I suppose that's the last of my biplane," said the aviator. "How deep is the lake around here, do any of you know?"

"I don't believe it's very deep right here," answered Gif. "Do you see that sandy beach over on the island yonder? Well, that sandbar extends out in this direction."

"Then maybe the machine didn't sink as far down as I thought it might," went on Tom Bossick, for such was his name. "I'd like to mark this spot if I could."

"Maybe you could dive overboard again and find out what became of the flying machine,"

suggested Dan Soppinger. "That is, unless you feel too weak."

"Oh, I'm all right. I went through a good deal worse than this when I was flying for Uncle Sam in France," said Bossick, with a grin. "If you fellows are not in a hurry I'd like to find out what did become of the old lady."

"If you fellows want to stay here with the aviator, we'll take Mr. Stevenson and Ruth over to Haven Point," said Jack.

"All right, go ahead," answered Gif readily. "We'll take the aviator over later, after he has located his machine. I suppose, if it's only in shallow water, it might be raised again?"

"So I was thinking," answered Tom Bossick.

A minute later the two boats separated and the four Rovers took up the task of rowing to Haven Point.

"It's mighty lucky for us that there's no wind and the sun is so warm," said Jack, as he glanced at the water still dripping from his own garments and those worn by the others who had been in the lake.

"We'll create a sight when we reach the town," was Randy's comment.

"I guess everybody will want to know what happened to the flying machine and if the folks on board were rescued," put in Fred. "You

three will be regular heroes," and he gave something of an envious glance at his cousins.

"Oh, say, Fred! Can that hero stuff," put in Andy quickly. "Anybody would have done what we did if only they had had the chance."

"Nevertheless, I'm very thankful to all of you," said Mr. Stevenson.

"Are you sure you weren't hurt quite a good deal, Mr. Stevenson?" questioned Jack. He noted that the face of Ruth's father was pale and haggard.

"Oh, I don't think it's very much, Jack. Of course, we came down so hard it gave us all a terrible jolt."

"It was like one of those roller-coaster boats hitting the water at a seaside resort," remarked Randy.

"A good deal worse than that!" cried Ruth. "You know, we came down nose first, as they say. Why, for an instant I thought I was going to be thrown out on my face. And, you must remember, we were several hundred feet up in the air when we started to fall."

"Oh, I know you came down pretty hard," answered Andy. "Why, the water splashed in every direction!"

After this there was a brief period of silence, the boys bending vigorously to their oars, feel-

ing that the Stevensons would like to get ashore and to shelter as soon as possible.

"I am staying at the Haven Point House," said Mr. Stevenson. "I'll go right up there and get an extra room for Ruth, and then we can telephone to Clearwater Hall and have some of the girls bring her some dry clothing. And I'll have a doctor look her over, as well as find out what's the matter with my side. I don't think it's much, but I want him to make sure. I have trouble enough these days without becoming sick," he added, with a thoughtful look on his face.

As anticipated, their coming to one of the docks of the town created not a little excitement. A number of persons had seen the erratic movements of the biplane and had witnessed its disappearance into the lake, and the news had spread that the aviator and his passengers were probably drowned. Several boats had put out to the scene of the disaster, but these now returned. A crowd surrounded the Stevensons and the cadets, asking numerous questions. But Jack soon obtained a taxicab, and into this the Stevensons were hurried and the driver was directed to take them at once to the hotel.

"We'll be up after a while," said Jack. "I want to telephone to Colonel Colby first, to let

him know we'll be late in getting back. I don't want to leave here until I find out what condition your father is really in."

With the Stevensons gone, the Rover boys told the crowd some of the particulars of what had happened.

"I think I know what was the trouble," said another aviator who was present, a man who occasionally took Tom Bossick's place. "Tom and I were going over the motor a couple of days ago, and I noticed that it wasn't as fast to the framework as it might be. It's my opinion it worked loose, and that threw the machine off its keel."

"The aviator didn't say what went wrong," answered Fred. "Perhaps he didn't know himself. But one thing is sure—the biplane bobbed around from one side to the other several times before it headed down into the lake."

"Well, they can all be thankful they escaped with their lives," said one of the bystanders, and in this statement everybody concurred.

The Rover boys telephoned to the military academy and gave the head of that institution a few of the particulars of what had occurred. Colonel Colby had heard nothing about the aeroplane accident, and was, of course, much surprised. He readily gave the boys permission to

remain in town for an hour longer in order that they might ascertain more of Mr. Stevenson's real condition.

A motor boat had been sent to the scene of the wreck, and this presently returned with Tom Bossick on board.

"The cadets in the other rowboat have returned to their school," said the aviator. "We found that the aeroplane was under less than twenty feet of water, so I have hopes that we can raise her and maybe have her repaired, or at least save the engine. I think she rests on that sandbar one of you young fellows mentioned."

"And what went wrong?" questioned Fred eagerly.

"I think the motor got loose somehow. We'll have to investigate after we raise the biplane—if we ever do."

A little later the four Rover boys went to the hotel. There they encountered Jack's sister Martha and Fred's sister Mary, who had just come over from Clearwater Hall with some dry clothing for Ruth. Of course the two Rover girls were greatly excited, and they rushed at their brothers and their cousins, demanding to know if they were perfectly all right.

"Sure we are!" declared Fred. "Why, I wasn't even in the water!"

"But the rest of you are dripping wet," declared Martha.

"We're all right," answered Jack. "But what we want to know is how Mr. Stevenson and Ruth are."

"Ruth says the bath didn't hurt her a bit," answered Mary. "But she is rather worried about her father."

A few minutes later Ruth came forth. Her hair was still wet and done up fantastically in a towel, but she wore the dry clothes the other girls had brought her.

"I'm perfectly all right," she said to Jack.

"What about your dad?"

"The doctor says he'll have to keep very quiet for a few days," went on the girl soberly. "He received a blow in the side just under the right arm. He is all black and blue."

"He seemed to be very haggard, Ruth," remarked the young major.

At this Ruth Stevenson gave Jack a look which he found hard to interpret. She caught Jack's hand and drew him a little to one side.

"Dad has been having a whole lot of trouble lately," she whispered. "Some time I'll tell you all about it—or at least as much as I know of it."

CHAPTER IV

A SUDDEN INTERRUPTION

QUARTER of an hour later found the four Rover boys once more on the lake, this time bound for Colby Hall. They had said good-by to Ruth. Mary and Martha were to return by taxicab to Clearwater Hall.

"You boys have got to be careful after this," said Jack's sister. "Suppose that flying machine had come down on top of you? You might all have been killed!"

"Yes. But suppose we hadn't been in that vicinity when it did come down?" returned her brother. "Ruth and all of them might have been drowned!"

"I understand Colby Hall and Longley Academy are going to have some boat races soon," said Mary to the twins. "Are you going to take part?" She knew that, as officers, Jack and Fred could not participate.

"Gif says he wants us in one of the races," answered Randy. "I certainly would like to put one over on some of those Longley fellows."

"I heard one of the Longley cadets bragging that the Colby Hall fellows were deserting as fast as they could and coming over to Longley," broke in Martha.

"That isn't true, Martha!" returned Andy. "We've lost just five cadets all told, and two of them were fellows we were glad to get rid of—Billy Sands and Paul Halliday."

"Oh, you mean the cadets who used to travel with Brassy Bangs!"

"Yes. And let me tell you something—Longley Academy has lost over fifteen pupils during the past year; and of those, four are now enrolled at Colby and three more are trying to get in. So I guess all told we have the best of it."

Jack had had no opportunity to ask Ruth the particulars of her father's trouble. But he had promised to see the girl a few days later or call her up on the telephone, and then, he knew, she would give him more of the facts.

"Mr. Stevenson certainly looked very haggard," he mused to himself. "He certainly must have something very serious on his mind. I hope it isn't something that will affect Ruth. It would be too bad if he lost his money or something like that and Ruth had to give up going to Clearwater Hall."

The strenuous happenings of the afternoon,

along with the unexpected bath of Jack and the twins, made the Rover boys rather weary, and so they took their time at rowing up the lake to the river.

"There is no use of our hurrying," declared Fred. "We won't be in time for the evening parade anyway. And Colonel Colby said we could take our own time."

"Just the same, I want to get there before the mess hall is closed," declared Andy. "I'm about famished."

"Don't say a word about being hungry!" returned his twin. "I wish we had bought some doughnuts, or something like that, before we left town."

"I'm sure Captain Dale will allow us something to eat even if the mess hall is closed," declared Jack. Captain Dale was one of their military instructors and the official who took charge of the academy during Colonel Colby's absence.

The summer day was drawing to a close and the sun was setting behind the hills to the west of Haven Point when the tired cadets reached the mouth of the Rick Rack River. Here there was a small island in the middle of the stream dividing that waterway into two rather narrow channels.

"Here comes a motor-boat!" exclaimed Fred presently, pointing up the river. "I wonder if it's one of our boats coming to meet us."

"I hope it is," returned Randy. "I'd much rather be towed back than do more rowing."

"It isn't one of our boats," said Jack, a few seconds later. "Our boats are all striped white and blue. This one is green and yellow."

"Green and yellow!" exclaimed Andy. "Why, that's the color of some of the Longley boats! To my mind they are the ugliest things on the lake."

It was indeed a motor-boat belonging to Longley Academy, and as it came closer the Rovers noted that it contained four cadets, two in khaki outing uniforms and the other two in the brilliant uniforms used by the Longley cadets when on parade.

"Gee! how those fellows do love to show off those uniforms," remarked Fred.

"Maybe that's the only suit of clothes they have to their backs," chuckled Andy.

The motor-boat coming down the river occupied the middle of the stream. As it reached the vicinity of the little island just mentioned it should have turned to the other channel from that being used by the Rover boys. Instead, however, it came rushing straight towards them.

"Hi, you! Get out of the way there! Look where you're running!" exclaimed Jack, in alarm.

"Ha-ha! Don't get scared," sang out a youth at the wheel of the motor-boat. "We won't run you down."

By this time the motor-boat was directly alongside of the rowboat. It came so close that the oars on that side scraped the hull of the heavier craft. There was a tremendous swell from the propeller, and the next instant a small wave hit the gunwale and dashed over the Rover boys' feet. The rowboat bobbed up and down in the narrow channel like a cork, the water foaming and churning all around it. In the meanwhile the motor-boat darted ahead and was soon out on the broad bosom of Clearwater Lake.

"Well, of all the gall!" burst out Andy, as soon as he could recover from his astonishment.

"They did that on purpose!" burst out Jack. "Did you see who was at the wheel?"

"It was Tommy Flanders!" cried Randy.

"He's sore over the way he was batted out of the box in those baseball games," remarked Fred. "Just the same, he had no business to endanger our lives in this narrow passage. I wish we could get hold of him," and he shook his head angrily.

"We can't follow a motor-boat in a rowboat,"

answered Jack. "Just the same, we ought to let him hear from us about this."

"If we only had one of our own new motor-boats," groaned Fred, "I bet we could catch that old tub!"

"Did you notice who the fellows in the gaudy uniforms were?" questioned Andy. "Our beloved friends, Halliday and Sands!"

"Yes, I noticed that," returned Jack. "They must be so stuck on those new gaudy uniforms they can't bear to go out without them. Who was the fourth fellow?"

No one could answer that question, and after gazing at the motor-boat until it was almost lost in the distance the Rover boys resumed their rowing and presently reached the military academy dock. A crowd was there to meet them, for Gif and the other cadets had spread the news of what had happened out on the lake.

"Here come the real heroes!" cried Gif good-naturedly. "Here are the ones who did the real rescue act!"

"Cut it out, Gif!" returned Jack. "What we want is to get into some dry clothing and get something to eat."

"Yes, and after that we've got something to tell you about Tommy Flanders and Sands and Halliday," added Randy.

The four boys hastened to report to Captain Dale and then hurried up to the rooms they occupied. They had four rooms in a row on the second floor. Jack occupied a small one and Fred another, while a third was used by the twins. The fourth room was a general sitting room and a place for study. This had been a meeting place many times for the Rover boys and their chums.

It did not take Jack and the twins long to change their clothing nor Fred to brush up a bit. This done, all hurried down to the mess room, a corner of which had been kept open for them. They found both Colonel Colby and Captain Dale on hand, anxious to learn a few particulars concerning the accident on the lake.

"It was a fortunate thing that you were on hand to aid those in the flying machine," remarked the master of the school, when he had heard their story. "I trust Mr. Stevenson is not seriously hurt."

After the meal the Rovers retired to their rooms and were there joined by Gif and Spouter. To their chums they related what had occurred at the entrance to the river.

"That's just like Flanders," remarked Gif, in disgust. "He always was the most overbearing fellow I ever met."

"Well, I can't say quite as much as that," an-

swered Jack. "You mustn't forget Gabe Werner and Slugger Brown," he added, mentioning the names of two school bullies who for various reasons had had to leave the military academy.

"Yes, and don't forget Bill Glutts, Werner's crony," put in Fred. "How I used to despise that butcher boy!"

"Now he has made something of a fizzle of his pitching, I understand Flanders is going in for rowing this summer," came from Spouter.

"Well, if he makes as much of a failure of his rowing as he did of his pitching he won't amount to a great deal," was Andy's comment.

"Don't be so sure of that, Andy," returned Jack. "Flanders wasn't a half-bad pitcher. The only trouble with him was that when he got into a real tight place he was apt to lose his head. If he could have kept cool, he would have been one of the best pitchers in these parts."

"We ought to get square with him for almost running us down," came from Fred. "Gee! that big motor-boat might have cut us right in two!"

"It's too bad he didn't run her on the rocks in that channel," was Randy's comment.

"We'll get square with Flanders some day. Just wait and see!" declared the young major.

The boys continued the discussion for a quar-

ter of an hour longer, and then the Rovers intimated that they would have to get at some of their studies for the next day. Taking this hint, Gif and Spouter took their departure.

"I wouldn't interfere with your learning for the world," said Spouter softly, as he stood in the doorway. "Learning is the very foundation of all knowledge. Were it not for learning, man would still be in the primitive state of a savage. Were it not for learning, man would still be groping in darkness wondering whither he was going and what his existence really meant. Were it not for learning, such a noble institution as Colby Hall would not exist. Were it not for learning—wow!"

Spouter's flowery oration came to a sudden termination as Andy threw a book which took the tall youth directly in the stomach. Picking the book up from the floor, Spouter hurled it at the fun-loving Rover's head and then fled precipitately down the corridor with Gif laughingly following him.

"Why don't you give Spouter a chance?" said Jack to his cousin. "For all you know, he may not have had a chance to talk to any one all day."

"Give him a chance!" snorted Andy. "Not when he goes off in that style! Why, when Spouter gets a spouting streak on him, he's like

a regular cataract, a cyclone and a tornado rolled in one. You've got to cut him off at the beginning or you can't hold him in," and at this rather mixed-up explanation all the others laughed.

A few minutes later the four Rover boys were deep in their studies. Jack had an essay to write on "Great Discoverers" and Fred an essay on "The Wonders of the Sky," while the twins had to wrestle with several problems in geometry. All were seated in their sitting room, as they termed it, with heads bent somewhat closely together over a round center table.

"Say, Jack, how do you spell Jupiter?" questioned the stoutest Rover boy. "Is it Ju-p-e- or Ju-p-i-?"

"What kind of Jew is that you're talking about?" put in Andy slyly, looking up with a pencil at his grinning lips.

"It's J-u-p-i-t-e-r," declared Jack.

"What in Jupiter are you writing about now, Fred?" questioned Randy.

" 'Wonders of the Sky,' " answered his cousin. "If I don't have this essay done by noon tomorrow I'll be sure to get into hot water with Professor Duke."

"I've got to hand in my essay by ten o'clock," put in the young major. "We'd all better be getting on the job—it's getting late."

After that there was silence for several minutes. Almost unconsciously the four boys heard a slight noise in the corridor. But to this they paid no attention, for cadets were continually going or coming in one direction or another. Then, of a sudden, came a most unexpected interruption. The door which had been left unlocked was suddenly opened and a masked figure appeared holding in one hand a well-filled paper bag. The next instant the paper bag was hurled through the air, landing directly on the center of the table. Then the door banged shut, hiding the masked figure from view.

But the Rover boys could not have seen the figure even if the door had been left open. As the paper bag crashed down on the table it flew apart and the next instant the four Rover boys found themselves covered with black soot from head to foot.

CHAPTER V

WHO WAS GUILTY?

"For the love of molasses!"

"Who—threw—that—stuff—in?" came in a splutter from Andy, who had received a large dose of the soot in his nose and mouth.

"Ker choo! Ker choo!" was the only sound made by his brother, on whom the soot acted like snuff.

"Did you ever see anything like it?" burst out Jack, trying to wipe the soot from his eyes with a handkerchief.

"Who played that dirty trick?" questioned Fred, who had been the first to speak.

"Some joke, I'll say!" muttered the young major of the Colby Hall battalion.

"Better say 'choke,'" sputtered Andy. Then, as he looked at his brother and his cousins, he burst into a fit of laughter, and in this his twin joined.

"We look like a lot of Negro minstrels, don't we?" was Fred's comment. "Gee, what a mess!"

he added, as he surveyed the table with its books and papers. "I guess my essay is spoiled."

"Mine ditto," responded Jack. "And I was writing it out so carefully, too," he added mournfully.

Randy was the first to step to the door and open it. He looked up and down the corridor, but saw no one. However, a few seconds later two cadets put in appearance. They were Fatty Hendry and Phil Franklin, the latter a lad who had become a warm friend of the Rovers through a thrilling rescue on the Rick Rack River and later by sharing many perils in Oklahoma and Texas.

"Hello, there! what's the idea?" exclaimed Phil Franklin, as he came to a halt and gazed at Randy in amazement.

"Are you getting ready for a masquerade?" questioned Fatty Hendry. "I didn't know there was anything of that sort going on to-night."

By this time the other Rovers had come to the doorway, and the two new arrivals gazed at them in added amazement. Then their eyes drifted to the center table and took in the wreckage there.

"Hannibal's ghost!" ejaculated the fat boy of the school. "What's this? It looks like lampblack."

"It's soot! Plain chimney soot!" answered

Jack, who by this time had partly cleared his eyes. "Some fellow was mean enough just now to open our door and throw that bag in on the table where we were all writing and studying."

"You don't say so!"

"Some mean trick, I'll say!" declared Phil Franklin, his eyes flashing. He stepped into the room. "An awful mess, eh? Your books and papers will be about ruined," he added. "Ink with it, too!"

"The bag struck my inkwell and knocked it over," answered Fred. "It certainly is a mess. I wish I knew who did it."

"Didn't you see the fellow at all?" questioned Fatty.

"I just caught a glimpse of him," answered Randy. "He was in uniform and had a pillow-case or something of the sort pulled over his head and neck so that I couldn't recognize him."

"Must have been one of your old enemies," commented Phil.

"I thought all of our enemies were gone," answered Jack, who was still dabbing away at his eyes with tears running down his cheeks. "Slugger Brown, Nappy Martell, Gabe Werner and Bill Glutts all got out some time ago; and now Brassy Bangs, Paul Halliday, and Billy Sands are gone too. I'm sure I don't know who can be left."

"You don't suppose it could be any of the fellows who wanted to be major of the battalion, do you?" asked Fatty.

"Or who wanted to be captain in place of Fred," added Phil.

"No, I don't believe any of those fellows would be mean enough to do this. They've all acted pretty nice since the election," answered Jack. "It must have been someone else."

"Going to report it?" came from the stout cadet.

"I don't think so, Fatty," said the young major slowly. "In the first place, we don't know who is guilty. And in the second place, I have no desire to become a telltale."

"We'll fight this out ourselves!" You just leave it to us!" broke in Andy. "The secret will come out sooner or later."

"I think the best thing we can do first of all is to clean up this mess and then wash up," said Fred. "Gee! I hardly know how to begin," he added, gazing at the disordered center table ruefully.

"Here's an old brush and an empty shoebox," returned Jack. "We'll brush the soot into the box as carefully as we can. We don't want any more of it to be flying around. As it is, this room will have to be dusted and cleaned up thoroughly."

"Well, if we can't help you we might as well

be on our way," said Fatty Hendry. "I have some boning to do before I hit the hay."

"And I've got some problems in algebra to solve," came from Phil.

"I don't see how you can help us unless you can find out who that masked cadet was," answered Jack.

"Listen!" put in Fred quickly. "If it's just the same to you fellows, keep this to yourselves, will you?"

"Sure!" answered Phil. "I won't say a word if you don't want me to." And to this Fatty also agreed.

The soot had certainly made a great mess, and it took the Rover boys the best part of half an hour to put the room in order. Luckily, their school books were not damaged quite as much as they had at first supposed, and by dusting them off with care they made the volumes fairly presentable. The essay papers, however, were spoiled, and both Jack and Fred decided they would have to be written over again.

"I'm going to get up real early to-morrow morning and do it," said Jack, and his cousin agreed to do the same.

Then the boys brushed their uniforms as best they could, and after that each took a bath, which made them feel better.

"I'm going to snoop around a little and see if I can get on the track of the rascal who played this trick," announced Randy, after he had donned clean clothing.

"And I'll go with you," answered his brother.

It still lacked half an hour of time to retire, and the others availed themselves of this to start the new copies of their essays. Just as the "lights out" bell was ringing the twins came in again.

"Nothing doing," announced Andy, with a disappointed look on his otherwise cheerful face. "All of the cadets look as meek as lambs."

"Couldn't spot a single soul who might have done it," added his brother. "But we'll get on to it sooner or later, you just watch me!" he continued determinedly.

True to their resolve, Jack and Fred were up a little after five in the morning and hard at work on their essays.

"We've got to make a good showing, Fred," remarked the young major, "not only because we're officers of the battalion, but because the folks at home expect it."

"Just the same, I'll be glad when vacation comes around," remarked the younger Rover.

"Wonder what we can do this summer."

"I don't know. I suppose the folks are plan-

ning to send us up to Valley Brook farm—at least for a few weeks."

"Well, I wouldn't mind seeing old Aunt Martha and Uncle Randolph, not to say anything about Jack Ness," was the reply. "But I wouldn't like to stay on the farm too long. It gets monotonous."

"Gee, if we could only go to some such place as Big Horn Ranch or Snowshoe Island!"

"Now you're talking! Well, something may turn up before the school closes; who knows?"

Presently the gong sounded for the cadets to assemble on the parade ground in front of the school building. At once the two young officers donned their coats and their swords and lost no time in hurrying below, followed presently by the twins, who had to go to the racks in the lower hall for their firearms.

Five minutes later another gong sounded, and by this time all of the cadets, except one or two who had been excused, were assembled on the parade ground. Major Jack was at the head of the battalion, which consisted of three companies, and beside him stood Captain Dale, who usually was present to witness the conduct of the cadets.

"Battalion, attention!" commanded the youthful major, and at once the cadets of the three com-

panies braced up and stood in long rows like so many ramrods.

"Present arms!" was the next command, and thereafter Jack put the battalion through the manual of arms. At the conclusion he looked inquiringly at Captain Dale.

"Very good, Major Rover," said the military instructor. "Very good, indeed."

After this came a slight pause, and then came another command.

"Battalion, attention! Forward, march!"

Boom! Boom! Boom, boom, boom! sounded out the drums, and then came a rattle and the shrill notes of the fifes and away marched the cadets, to circle the Hall and then enter the building. Here the guns and swords were discarded and the boys poured into the big mess hall, there to seat themselves at the long tables provided, each in his accustomed place. Then, after a blessing asked by one of the professors, they all fell to eating with great gusto.

Jack did his best that day to settle his mind on his studies, yet many times he found himself thinking of Ruth and her father and wondering what was the trouble that had come to Mr. Stevenson.

"It must be something out of the ordinary,"

mused the young major. "Otherwise, Ruth wouldn't have bothered to mention it. It's too bad — and just when her father is under the weather, too!"

Of course, the Rovers and the others who had been out on the lake when the biplane crashed down were asked innumerable questions by their friends, and they had to tell the particulars of the mishap over and over again. Those who had gone overboard were asked if they had suffered anything from the sudden plunge.

"Not at all," answered Randy. "It was just like taking a bath before Saturday night comes around, you know," and at this some of the cadets who were listening grinned.

Among the boys to listen to an account of what the Rovers and their chums had to relate was Henry Stowell, a lanky young cadet who, because of the peculiar broad mouth he possessed, often went by the nickname of Codfish. Stowell was a regular sneak, and had often been a toady of some of the bullies who had from time to time been cadets at the Hall. He was thoroughly disliked by a large number of the pupils. On more than one occasion the Rovers had done Codfish favors, and twice they had rescued him from those who would do the cadet harm. But though Stowell had promised to mend his ways, he had soon slumped

in his habits and become just as much of a sneak and a telltale as ever.

"Those people ought to give you a big reward for saving their lives," said Stowell. "They ought not to expect you to do that for nothing."

"We weren't out for any reward, Codfish," answered Randy promptly.

"Oh, that's all right," said the sneak, pulling down the corners of his broad mouth. "Just the same, a reward comes in mighty handy, especially when a fellow's pocket money is getting low." Stowell's allowance was small, and it was a notorious fact among those who knew him best that he was continually borrowing from those more fortunate than himself.

"That sneak makes me sick," declared Andy, when he and his brother were by themselves. "I suppose if he had been there he would have said, 'Give me ten dollars or I won't haul you out of the lake!' "

"He certainly is a poor stick; and all of the lessons we've given him haven't improved him any, so far as I can see," answered Randy.

It was not until three days later that the Rovers had a chance to go over to Clearwater Hall. In the meantime, however, the young major had taken it upon himself to call up his sister on the telephone.

From Martha he learned that Mr. Stevenson had gone home. His side was still very sore and Jack's sister said that he looked more haggard than ever.

"I think he has something on his mind," Martha said, over the wire. "But what it is I, of course, don't know. Nor did I care to question Ruth. Perhaps she will tell you something about it herself."

Because of this, Jack was quite concerned when he and his four cousins got a chance to ride down to Haven Point in one of the school automobiles. The chauffeur of the car, Bob Nixon, said he was going to stay in town two hours, which would give the boys a chance to run up to the girls' school and see their relatives and friends.

As a usual thing, outsiders were not permitted at Clearwater Hall except upon special occasions. But there was an understanding between Colonel Colby and Miss Garwood, the head of the girls' school, whereby the Rovers could visit their relatives almost any time. And this, of course, usually gave them a chance to see Ruth Stevenson and May Powell, Spouter's cousin. Spouter often came also, bringing Gif with him.

The young folks met in the lower hall of the institution and then strolled out under the big trees of the campus. They talked about matters

in general and also about Mr. Stevenson's condition.

"I think he'll get over his injuries in a week or two," declared Ruth. "He certainly got bumped most dreadfully."

Presently, as had happened before, Jack and Ruth walked off a little by themselves, and then the young major questioned the girl regarding her father's troubles.

"Of course you haven't got to say anything if you don't want to, Ruth," he added. "But if there is anything I could do to help I'd like to know it."

"I don't know how you can help us, Jack," answered the girl soberly. "But daddy certainly has trouble—and of a most unexpected sort."

"Something to do with his business, I suppose?"

"Yes and no, Jack. He has had a very valuable book of formulas stolen," answered the girl.

CHAPTER VI

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE STORM

"A BOOK of formulas?" repeated the young major of the Colby Hall battalion. "Just what do you mean by that, Ruth?"

"It's rather a long story, Jack, and I don't know all of the particulars. But it seems that during the great World War two Germans, brothers, came to this country, bringing with them some formulas for making artists' paints. They had been in the business both in Germany and in France and could produce most wonderful shadings in these artists' materials."

"I see, Ruth. I know the Germans were always great on formulas of dyes and things like that."

"Well, these two Germans were very old men, and in a roundabout way they offered to sell these formulas, for they felt that they were too old to go into the manufacture of such things.

"Now, my father, as perhaps you know, has been interested for several years in a small paint works located in the Middle West. Through the

manager of these paint works he was introduced to the two old Germans who came East to see him and finally offered him these wonderful formulas, provided he would keep the entire matter secret.

"They proved to his satisfaction that they owned all rights to the preparations, and offered to sell said rights for the sum of thirty thousand dollars."

"Thirty thousand dollars!" exclaimed Jack. "Some little sum of money, I'll say!"

"My father didn't have so much cash, but he borrowed some from a bank and got some more from old Uncle Barney, who was making money out of those zinc ore beds on Snowshoe Island. Together they went in and bought the formulas, which were written out in detail in a leather-bound notebook. They had originally been written in German and in French, but were translated by one of the old Germans into English."

"And after your father had purchased this book of formulas it was stolen from him?"

"Yes. He brought it home with him and would have placed it in a safe deposit vault, but took it home for the purpose of making a duplicate copy. Of course, he didn't want to trust any outsiders with the secret just yet; so he started in to make the copy himself."

"Then the book was stolen?"

"Exactly! It disappeared one night. He had left it locked up in his desk, and when he went for it the next day he found that his desk had been broken open and that the valuable book of formulas had disappeared."

"What of the copy he had been making?"

"That had disappeared also."

"Gracious! No wonder he was upset, Ruth. Thirty thousand dollars is no mean price to pay for a thing and then have it stolen. Did he suspect anybody?"

"There was nobody to suspect. Our maid had left our employ about a week before and gone to live with a family in Philadelphia. There was nobody at home but my mother and my father, for mother had not yet succeeded in getting another maid."

"But wasn't there any trace of the thief?"

"They found that a window of the library had been broken open; but that was all. Nothing was disturbed in the house except the desk. That was of the regular roller-top variety and of course could be broken open with ease."

"The thief or thieves must have been watching your father while he was using the book. Otherwise they wouldn't have been so certain where it could be found."

"That is what daddy thinks. While he was making his copy he sat under the light with the curtains of the windows only partly drawn. Anybody outside could have looked in."

"Did your father suspect the two old Germans?"

"Not at all. They were nowhere near. Both of them had gone to live with relatives out in Milwaukee. He at once telegraphed to them, telling of the loss and asking if they had duplicate copies of the formulas. They at once sent a night letter stating they had no duplicates, and advising him to be on the lookout for two men named Norris and Lemrech. Later my father received a letter in which the old Germans told about two workmen who had tried their best to get the formulas away from them. These workmen were Carl Lemrech and Tex Norris, his American cousin. They said that Lemrech was of a shady reputation, and not above stealing the formulas, and that evidently his American cousin was the same stripe of man."

"Has your father been able to get on the trail of those two men?"

"No. He hired a detective to follow them up, but they had left the boarding house where they had been staying for some time and had disappeared."

"Then it is this that is making your father look so haggard, Ruth!"

"Yes. Because as soon as he obtained the formulas and was satisfied that they were really as valuable as anticipated, he took some more money belonging to himself and to my Uncle Barney and purchased a factory in which to manufacture these artists' colors. He had samples of the colors, and, oh, Jack, you never saw such beautiful greens and reds and blues in all your life! They were simply wonderful! I'm sure artists would go crazy over them!"

"I suppose your father is at a standstill in the case then."

"Absolutely. If something doesn't turn up soon I don't know what he will do."

"Has he told your Uncle Barney about this loss?"

"Yes. He sent word the day after the flying machine accident."

"What has your Uncle Barney to say about it?"

"I don't know. I haven't heard from him. But I suppose he'll be just as much upset as daddy. I think he put every cent he had got out of the zinc mines into this new concern."

"It's too bad, Ruth. I wish I could help you. If only a fellow could get on the trail of this Lemrech and his cousin Norris! Does your

father suppose they will be able to use the formulas?"

"More than likely. You see, the whole affair was conducted more or less in secret. That being the fact, what is to prevent those two rascals from selling the formulas to some other color maker?" answered the girl somewhat sadly.

A few minutes later the two rejoined the others. Andy was cutting up and telling some of his queer jokes, and he had the girls shrieking with laughter.

"And that puts me in mind of another!" Jack heard his fun-loving cousin exclaim. "When is an apple pie more than an apple pie?"

"Oh, Andy! how can an apple pie be more than just an apple pie?" murmured May Powell.

"Isn't it more of an apple pie when it's a peach of an apple pie?" retorted Andy. And then May made a pass at him with a book she was carrying.

"You haven't said a thing about the races you are going to have with Longley Academy," came from Mary Rover. "Who is going to be in them? And when are they to take place? And are we going to be able to see them?"

"That's all right, Cousin Mary! Fire three questions at a fellow all at once!" broke out Randy. "There are to be some single shell races, a four-oared race, and an eight-oared race. Also

they are talking of getting up a race between two of the motor-boats."

"My! but a race between motor-boats would be exciting," murmured Martha.

"Andy and Randy are to be in one of the four-oared races," said Jack. "Who is to row with them hasn't yet been decided. Probably Spouter and Dan Soppinger. A lot of the other fellows will be in the singles and in the eight-oared events. The contests are to come off a week from next Saturday."

"Where will they be held?" questioned May.

"That's to be decided in a few days. Longley wants 'em on the other side of the lake and we want 'em on this side. I hope they have 'em on this side, because then all the folks living in and around Haven Point will be able to witness them."

All too soon the visit had to come to an end, and with cheery good-bys the boys hurried back to Haven Point. They found Bob Nixon waiting for them.

"I was going to give you five minutes more," declared the Hall chauffeur. "We'd better be getting back. It's getting late."

After that matters went along smoothly for several days. The Rover boys paid close attention to their studies. During that time the boys heard from the aviator and his wrecked biplane.

It had been found that the biplane could be raised with comparative ease, and this had been done and it had then been floated over to the shore. The propeller was broken, as already mentioned, and one of the wings of the flying machine was also damaged. It was learned that the motor had become loosened from its fastenings, just as the other aviator had surmised, and this had caused all the trouble. The machine was taken away and the aviators went with it, and that was the last seen or heard of them for the time being. The aero corporation paid Mr. Stevenson's doctor's bill. Perhaps they looked for a suit for damages, but it was not forthcoming.

The next Sunday the Rover boys attended one of the churches at Haven Point and met Mary and Martha and a number of the other girls.

"It's been decided that we're to hold the races on this side of the lake," said Fred, after the services were over and they were outside talking to the girls. "It was decided by a toss-up, and, believe me, the Longley crowd was mad when they lost. They chewed it over for nearly an hour before they would give in. They said that it would be much better to race over on the other side of the lake, along where the Hasley Shell Loading Company used to have its ammunition plant."

"Good gracious! do they want to blow us all up?" questioned Martha, who had not forgotten the terrible experience all of them had had when some of the buildings of the shell loading company had been blown up, as related in detail in "The Rover Boys Under Canvas."

"Oh, as far as that is concerned, the plant went out of existence long ago," answered Jack. "But there isn't much of a population over there, and it will be much nicer to have it on this side where so many people can look at it from the shore. It was decided that Longley Academy should have the use of one of the big docks, so they'll have no cause to complain."

"Can we be on hand to see the races?" questioned Ruth.

"That, of course, will depend on what Miss Garwood has to say," answered the young major. "But I think Colonel Colby will see her about it and fix it up. And if he does, you may be sure that we'll take care of all of you."

"I know Tommy Flanders expects to row. He's been bragging about it everywhere," declared May.

"Well, he used to brag a good deal about baseball," answered Andy.

"He says that he has gotten all over the trouble that he had with his arm and that this sea-

son he's going to pitch again," went on Spouter's cousin.

A little later the Rovers found themselves returning to Colby Hall on foot. It was rather a misty day, and before they had covered half of the distance to the school it had begun to rain. The sky grew exceedingly dark.

"I don't like this much!" exclaimed Fred. "Not an umbrella nor a raincoat in the bunch, either!"

"I don't want to get this uniform wet," put in Randy. "It's the best I've got."

"Mine is getting awfully tight," commented Fred. "If it begins to shrink I don't know what I'll do."

"Colonel Colby's uniforms don't shrink," put in Jack. "Your uniform is tight because you're getting too fat, Fred."

"Oh, let up on my getting fat," pleaded the youngest Rover. "I'm not half as fat as Fatty Hendry."

"And you don't want to be!" exclaimed Randy. "Gosh! Fatty'll never have to work for a living. All he'll need to do is to sit on a platform in a side show and look pleasant and sell his photographs for twenty-five cents a copy."

The downpour now became so heavy that the lads were forced to seek shelter in an old barn

standing by the side of the road. So far there had been no thunder or lightning, but now they heard a distant rumble, and presently the sky to the westward was brilliantly illuminated.

"Gee! I guess we're in for a regular summer storm," said Fred. "Wish we were back at the Hall."

"We'll be late for dinner, that's certain," said Randy.

The rain continued to come down and presently there was more lightning followed by a sharp clap of thunder.

"It's getting worse," said Jack.

"I hope the lightning doesn't strike this old shack," answered Fred.

"Oh, it isn't likely, Fred. I think——"

What Jack thought will never be known, for at that instant there came a crash of another sort, followed by a yell and a jingle of glass. Through the side of the old barn broke a big six-cylindered touring car. The hood of the car was carried away by the impact, and the machine turned over on its side, burying its single occupant, a man, beneath it.

CHAPTER VII

WHO THE MAN WAS

For several seconds after the crash came the four Rover boys were so startled that they did nothing but stare at the overturned touring car. The sky being so overcast, it was dark in the barn, so they could see little. Then, however, came another flash of lightning which revealed to them the body of the man lying partly outside and partly under the overturned tonneau, the top of which had been completely wrecked.

"Gosh, I wonder if he's killed!" gasped Fred.

"Looks as if he might be," returned Jack, for the man neither moved nor made any outcry.

The wheels of the automobile were still spinning around and two or three strokes came from the engine. But then the power died away and the wheels stopped.

"If only the wreck doesn't catch on fire!" burst out Randy. He well knew the danger from such a source. As all of my young readers must know, gasoline is very inflammable when unconfined and needs but a single spark to touch it off.

"She's leaking, all right! And it isn't the radiator, either!" announced Randy, as another flash of lightning came in through the open doorway and the broken side of the old barn.

Jack was already looking around the structure, and now he found what he wanted—a couple of beams which had been used to brace up the old building.

"Come on, quick! We've got to pry the machine up and pull that man out," he ordered. "Everybody on the job!"

His cousins understood and all four boys went to work with a will. Fortunately, the instructions received during the Hall encampment now stood them in good stead; and under Jack's directions they soon placed two large stones in position and then, using the beams as levers, pried up the car, the others holding it while Fred pulled the unfortunate individual from beneath.

"Bend down, Fred, and see if there's anybody else in the car," cried Jack. "There might be someone we didn't notice."

The young captain did as asked. All he could discover was a light overcoat and a gladstone bag, and he hauled both of these out. Then the car was allowed to settle once more. Both the gasoline and the water were running from it, but so far there seemed to be little danger of fire.

"Unless, of course, the lightning should strike the place," said Jack. "Then everything will go up in a hurry."

The fumes of the gasoline were now heavy, and the Rover boys lost no time in carrying the man outside. He was unconscious, but they were glad to know that he was not dead. His face was covered with dirt and blood and his clothing was torn away from his left arm, which was also bleeding.

"A pretty bad case, I should say," said Fred. "He looks a little bit familiar to me, too. Do any of you recognize him?"

"Can't recognize anybody with so much blood and dirt," announced Andy.

All set to work to do what they could for the hurt man, fearing every instant that he might die on their hands. Despite the rain, they scooped up water from a nearby pool and, using their handkerchiefs, bathed the sufferer. They were doing this when he gave a gasp and presently opened his eyes.

"Oh, oh!" he groaned. "What did I hit? Was it a barn?" and then he closed his eyes again.

"Maybe he isn't hurt as badly as we thought," cried Jack, in relieved tones. "There doesn't seem to be any glass in his eyes, and he can be mighty thankful for that."

Fred and Andy had gone for more water, and presently came back with an old tin can filled. With this Jack continued to bathe the face of the sufferer, washing the blood away as best he could, while Randy worked over the man's arm, which was cut and scratched in a dozen places.

It was still very dark, but an occasional flash of lightning lit up the scene, and it was during one of these flashes that Jack suddenly uttered an exclamation.

"Do you know what I think?" he exclaimed. "I think this is Mr. Garrison!"

"What! Gif's father?" ejaculated Fred. "Uncle Fred?" He had always called the man after whom he had been named "uncle," even though they were not relatives.

"Yes, sir, it's Gif's father!" answered the young major. "It's a wonder I didn't recognize him before!"

"Gif's father! Think of that!" murmured Andy. "Gee, I hope he isn't hurt very much! It will be a terrible shock to Gif, not to say anything about his mother!"

Having recognized the man as the father of one of their best chums, and one who in years gone by had been a great chum of the older Rovers, the boys renewed their efforts on behalf of the sufferer, carrying him to a shed some dis-

tance back of the old barn. Here they found some straw and a few empty bags and laid Mr. Garrison upon those.

"We might better get a doctor for him and telephone the news to Colby Hall," said Jack. "I guess I can run back to Haven Point and get someone."

"Want me to go with you?" asked Andy. "Or would you rather that the three of us stayed here and took care of him?"

"You'd better stay and do everything you can," answered the young major, and then set off on a dog-trot through the rain.

Less than half an hour later Jack had obtained the services of a Doctor Parsons, who happened to be in his office at the time, and had likewise telephoned to Colby Hall, getting Captain Dale on the wire. The captain had said that he would at once inform Gif and also Colonel Colby and that someone would come to the old shed as speedily as possible. Then the young major and the doctor set off in the latter's automobile for the scene of the accident, the physician taking bandages and his medical case.

In the meantime those left at the shed continued to do what they could for Mr. Garrison, and presently had the satisfaction of seeing him open his eyes once more. The storm was lessen-

ing, the lightning and thunder fast drawing off to the eastward, and it was growing lighter.

"Oh, my head!" murmured the sufferer. "And my arm! What's the matter with my arm?" he questioned feebly.

"You've had a terrible shaking up, Uncle Fred," said his namesake kindly.

"Uncle Fred? Who is that that is speaking?" The man stared at the young captain. "Why, I declare, it's Fred Rover! Where did you come from?"

"We were in the old barn keeping out of the rain when you smashed into it and upset your machine."

"We? Who do you mean? Oh, I see! Here are Andy and Randy." Mr. Garrison tried to go on, but for the moment was too weak to do so. "I thought I was going to be killed!" he groaned.

"I suppose your car skidded?" suggested Randy.

"It did. You see, I thought it wouldn't be necessary to put on the chains because I was going to stop at Haven Point, and then go up to the school to-morrow. I came around the curve and then, all of a sudden, lost control, and the next thing I knew I hit something and then—and then I didn't know anything."

"That was when you smashed through the side of the barn almost where we were standing."

"Did I hurt you?"

"Oh, no. We weren't touched. But the car went over and you were caught under it and we had to drag you out," answered Andy. "The glass cut you up pretty well and something tore the clothing from your arm and hurt it."

Mr. Garrison tried to sit up, and then fell back helplessly.

"I feel as if I'd been through a wringer," he murmured. "Can you get a doctor?"

"Jack has already gone for one."

"Oh, then he was here too?"

"Yes. He has gone to Haven Point to get a doctor, and said he would telephone to Colby Hall."

"Poor Gif! And I was going to give him a pleasant surprise to-morrow," murmured the sufferer. "Well, I suppose I can be thankful I wasn't killed or hurt worse. The glass might have gotten into my eyes and blinded me."

A little later the physician and the young major arrived and the medical man went to work at once over the sufferer.

"It doesn't look as if any bones were broken," he announced, after a careful examination. "But he has received quite a shock and a severe bruise

on the head and another on his arm besides all these cuts and scratches."

He was still at work when an automobile drew up nearby, driven by Bob Nixon. It contained Colonel Colby and Gif.

"My dad! Where is my dad?" demanded Gif excitedly. "Is he badly hurt?"

"The doctor says it isn't serious, Gif," answered Jack, catching his chum by the arm, for he could see that Gif was trembling all over. "Take it easy, old man. He only got bumped and scratched."

There was a good deal of excitement for a few moments, Gif kneeling by his father's side and holding his uninjured hand tightly. Everyone present could see how much the father and son thought of each other. Then Colonel Colby came forward to greet the man who in years gone by had been his schoolmate at Putnam Hall.

"Tough luck, Fred!" he said kindly. "But we're all mighty glad that you weren't killed."

"Well, I'm glad myself, Larry," responded Mr. Garrison, and for just an instant his old-time smile flitted across his face.

At first it was decided to take Mr. Garrison to the doctor's home in Haven Point. But Gif demurred somewhat at this, and Colonel Colby caught the cadet by the arm.

"Would you rather have him at the Hall?" questioned the master of the institution kindly. "If so, I'll be only too glad to let him use one of the rooms in my house. Young Professor Ditson has left, and your father might as well have that room as not. It overlooks the river and would be an ideal place for him."

"Oh, Colonel! If you only would take him up there," cried Gif, "then I could see him two or three times a day. And I'm sure mother would feel better, too. You know, she thinks a great deal of you and your school."

"Then we'll take him to the Hall," was the prompt reply. "I think we can carry him right up in our automobile, and we'll ask the doctor to come along so that he can do everything possible for your father after we put him to bed."

The heavy storm had now let up considerably, although the dark clouds still hovered to the eastward and the rumble of thunder could be heard in the distance. With great care the men and boys, assisted by the chauffeur, managed to get the sufferer into the back of the Colby Hall automobile. There he was made as comfortable as possible on a bedding of straw, sacks, and robes. Then all set out for the school, followed by the doctor, who carried several of the cadets with him, Colonel Colby and Gif riding with the sufferer.

The news of the accident had spread, and quite a number of cadets were on hand to see Mr. Garrison taken from the automobile and placed in the residence occupied by Colonel Colby's family and some of the professors. But there was no noise or confusion, and the cadets were informed that they must keep away from the place until further orders. In the meanwhile, a trained nurse had been telephoned for, and she soon arrived from Haven Point and took charge under the physician's directions.

"Gee, you fellows don't know how thankful I am to you for what you have done," said Gif earnestly to the Rover boys. He had had a toothache that morning, and consequently had not gone to church with the others. Now the excitement had driven the toothache completely away.

"We are glad we were on hand to help him," answered Jack.

"Seems to me we're becoming regular 'Johnnies on the Spot,'" chuckled Andy. "First when the flying machine went to pieces and now at this auto accident!"

When the doctor finally came away he told Gif that his father would probably be all right in a week or ten days.

"The bruises are just plain bruises and nothing else," declared the physician. "Of course, his face

and his arm will feel mighty sore for a while and it will take time for those cuts and scratches to heal. But so far as I can see there is nothing serious."

Several days passed, and during that time the smashed automobile was taken away. Mr. Garrison was soon able to sit up and enjoy his meals. He spent many a pleasant hour with Colonel Colby, the two talking over their numerous adventures while they had been classmates with the older Rovers.

"I came to give Gif and his chums a little surprise," said Mr. Garrison.

"Well, you gave them a surprise, all right enough," broke in Colonel Colby, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"It wasn't that kind of surprise, Larry," answered Mr. Garrison. "I had quite something else in my mind," and then he mentioned what it was.

"That's fine, Fred! Fine!" exclaimed the owner of the Hall. "I'm sure that Gif will be delighted, and his chums too. I know that that whole bunch of boys was tickled to death when Songbird Powell invited them out to Big Horn Ranch."

CHAPTER VIII

THE FOUR-OARED RACE

Following the conversation between Colonel Colby and Mr. Garrison Gif called upon his father and the two held a talk lasting the best part of an hour. When the son was ready to leave his face glowed with satisfaction.

"It's dandy of you, Dad! Just dandy!" he said, catching his parent by the hand. "And won't the others be surprised!"

"Are you going to tell them now, Gif? Before I arrange those details?"

"I suppose I might. But, no! I think I'll keep them guessing for a while. I'll just hint at what is coming."

"You are to have some boat races here soon, I believe?"

"Yes, Dad. They come off Saturday."

"Of course you hope to win?"

"We certainly do! You see, I'm at the head of the student athletic committee, and that, of course, takes in rowing here. The races are to

be against Longley Academy, the place that has been recently turned into a military school."

That day Mrs. Garrison appeared to see her husband and was glad to know that he was not injured nearly as much as she had anticipated. She remained with him for several days, being the guest of Colonel Colby, whom she knew quite well.

In a large school like Colby Hall there were, of course, many who could row well, and in the past there had been a number of races on the river and the lake. There were, in fact, a number of regular crews, and the school possessed an eight-oared shell, two four-oared shells, and a dozen or more singles and doubles.

"There will be three races," announced Gif. "A race for the singles, one for the four-oared, and one for the eight-oared."

"What about the motor-boat?"

"Colonel Colby wouldn't think of that. He said that these contests must be contests of muscle, not gasoline."

There had been a general try-out of all the available material for races in the school, and as a result of this three cadets had been chosen to represent Colby in the singles against three cadets from the rival academy. Then four other cadets with a coxswain were entered for the four-oared

shell and eight cadets with a coxswain for the final event.

"Hurrah! we're in the four-oared event," cried Randy, catching his twin by the arms. "We're to row in that race along with Spouter and Dan Soppinger."

"Gee, I hope we win!" was the reply.

"Oh, we've got to win!"

"Of course you've got to win," broke in Fred. "If you don't win I'll lambaste the life out of you!"

"You've got to do it for the glory of Colby!" exclaimed Jack. "We've got to smother Longley Academy." Secretly it fretted him and Fred not a little to think that as officers of the school battalion they could not participate in any of these contests.

"What is Gif going to do? Just sit and look on?" questioned Andy.

"No. He's to be coxswain of the eight."

"And who will manage our four?"

"That hasn't been decided yet; but it will probably be Walt Baxter."

"Well, he's all right," answered Andy.

Every afternoon after the school session was over those who were to participate in the various races went down to the river to practice. Gif and his assistants were here, there, and everywhere

directing the work. And even old Si Crews, the gymnastic instructor, did what he could to aid the cadets.

"If only it doesn't rain on Saturday!" said Jack.

He had heard through Martha that the girls at Clearwater Hall were to come down to Haven Point and occupy a dock which had been hired for the occasion. This dock and a number of others were to be gayly decorated with bunting supplied by Colonel Colby. To make the occasion more festive the colonel and the owners of Longley Academy had hired a local brass band.

At last the all-important day arrived, and although it was rather cloudy early in the morning by eleven o'clock the sun came out brightly, much to everybody's satisfaction.

The races were to start at two o'clock, and shortly after one the visitors from all directions began to come in; those from across the lake in various kinds of boats and others by carriage and automobile. Soon the docks at Haven Point were crowded and a row of men, women and young people lined the lake for a mile or more.

The Colby cadets had a dock to themselves directly next to that occupied by the girls from Clearwater Hall. The boys were in fine fettle, and no sooner had they assembled than they boomed out with their well-known refrain:

"Who are we?
Can't you see?
Colby Hall!
Dum! Dum! Dum, dum, dum!
Here we come with fife and drum!
Colby! Colby! Colby Hall!"

And the singing of this refrain was followed by a blare from tin horns and the noisy sound of many rattles.

But Longley was also at hand with a song of its own, followed by wild cheering and a number of catcalls.

"Here is where Colby Hall gets snowed under!"

"They won't be in it with good old Longley!"

"Make it three straight victories, boys! Three straight victories!"

And to this the cadets of Colby Hall answered with equal vigor.

"Colby to the front, first, last, and all the time!"

"There is only one military academy on this lake, and that's good old Colby!"

"Don't forget to show 'em what real rowing means!"

And then came cries and toots and rattles from both schools until the noise was fairly deafening and the girls, who were between the two factions, had to hold their ears.

"Oh, I do hope Colby Hall wins!" whispered Ruth to Martha.

"You don't wish it any more than I do," was the quick reply.

"Spouter is going to row with Andy and Randy and Dan Soppinger," put in May. "Oh, I do hope they come out ahead!"

"I just heard something," put in another girl, Alice Strobell by name. "Tommy Flanders is going to row in the four-oared race and Paul Halliday and Billy Sands and another cadet are to be with him."

"Oh, in that case they'll row against our crowd!" cried Annie Larkins, her chum. And then the brass band struck up and everybody listened to the music.

The three cadets from Colby Hall to enter the singles were Bart White, Darrell Harkness, and Peter Floyd. They had wanted to be officers of the battalion, but having failed of election and still being somewhat popular Gif had given them the chance of representing the school on the water.

After all of the preliminaries had been arranged and the judges were in their places, the first race was called. It was for a little over a mile, around one of the small islands and back to the starting

point. Soon the six single shells were lined up and at a report of a pistol they were off.

"Go it, boys! Go it for all you're worth!" cried Jack enthusiastically. But this call was swallowed up in a volume of sound from several hundred throats.

The Colby Hall contestants held out well until the island, which was the turning point, was almost reached. Then, however, they began to lose ground, and when the island had been passed it was seen that the three oarsmen from Longley were in the lead.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! What did we tell you!" came from the cadets of the rival academy. "That's the way to do it!"

"Come on, boys! The race is already yours!"

"Pull, Colby, pull!" screamed Fred, even though it was doubtful that his voice could carry such a distance. "Pull as you never pulled before!"

Swiftly the six single shells approached the finishing point of the race. Now it could be seen that one of the Longley oarsmen was slowly but surely dropping behind, while one of the rowers from Colby was just as surely forging ahead.

"Bart White is crawling up!"

"Pull, Bart! Pull!" was the cry from a Colby supporter. "You can win yet if you try!"

The finishing line was still ten yards off when

suddenly Bart White passed the fellow from Longley who was dropping behind. Then he fought nobly to catch the two still ahead.

But the distance was too short to do this, and while he was crawling up steadily, before he could come within a length of the two forward shells they crossed the line amid yells from Longley which were deafening. The first race stood Longley first, second and fourth, with Colby third, fifth and sixth. As there had been but two prizes for this race, both went to Longley.

"Oh, dear! I hope we have better luck in the next event," murmured May. She thought a great deal of her cousin Spouter, and wanted him to win.

Inside of half an hour the four-oared shell race was called, and out from one of the docks shot the Colby boat with Andy, Randy, Dan, and Spouter in their places and Walt Baxter as coxswain. From another dock shot the Longley shell containing Flanders, Halliday, Sands, and two cadets who were unknown to our friends.

It was plainly to be seen that in this race Longley Academy was "out for blood," as the saying goes. Tommy Flanders' face looked so stern that it was almost hateful, while Sands and Halliday showed that they were going to do everything possible to down their former schoolmates.

The intense rivalry resulted in some rather sharp maneuvering around the starting point, and some thought the Longley cadets endeavored to foul the Colby boat and possibly damage it. This led to some sharp remarks, which, however, were quickly stopped by those in charge of the affair. Both crews were ordered to their places and given very definite instructions regarding the race. Then came the word to get ready. Bang! went the pistol. They were off!

This race was to be an affair of about two miles around another one of the numerous islands which dotted the lake. The course had been laid out with care and motor-boats were doing their best to keep it clear.

The start was a beautiful one, and for a full half mile the two four-oared shells kept almost side by side. Then Colby Hall crept a little bit ahead.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Colby is gaining!"

"That's the way to do it, boys!"

"The race is ours!"

But this last remark a moment later was seen to be premature, for with a mighty effort Longley increased its stroke and slowly but surely came up to the Colby shell and then with equal sureness passed it.

"Longley is ahead!"

"Stick to the front, boys! Don't let 'em catch you!"

These and numerous other cries came from the supporters of the academy from across the lake. Thus encouraged, Longley kept forging ahead until a distance of at least a hundred feet separated them from Colby.

"Oh, dear!" moaned May. "We're going to lose this race too!"

"Perhaps not," answered Ruth Stevenson hopefully.

"Gee! why don't our boys get a move on?" whispered Fred to Jack. The two young officers were side by side and the face of each showed his intense anxiety.

"Maybe Walt is holding them in a little," answered the young major. "Those Longley boys may be using up their muscle too quickly."

Presently the island was rounded and the two four-oared shells started for the finishing line. Longley was still a hundred feet or more in advance and kept that distance in spite of what the other boat seemed to be doing to overtake them.

"It's our race! It's our race!" yelled the Longley cadets enthusiastically, and caps, rattles, and horns were thrown wildly up into the air.

Then came the last quarter of the race, and now it could be seen that the coxswain of the Colby

shell was talking earnestly to those under him. At once the stroke of the Colby oarsmen was increased, and slowly but surely the craft began to creep closer and closer to that ahead.

"That's the stuff, Colby! Go to it!" yelled Jack at the top of his lungs. "Colby! Colby! Colby!" and this cry was taken up over and over and over again, ringing out up and down and across the lake.

And now the finish of the race was but a hundred yards off. Longley was still nearly a hundred feet ahead, but the oarsmen in that craft, and especially Tommy Flanders, looked all but winded. They tried in vain to increase their stroke. It could not be done, and the only result of the effort was to throw Paul Halliday out of stroke and thus for an instant to disorganize the whole crew. Then slowly but surely, with set teeth and eyes that seemed to strain from their sockets, the Colby crew came on.

"Row! Row!" called out Walt Baxter sharply. "Row! Row!" suiting the words to the movement of his body.

And the cadets under him did row as they had never rowed before, and when the finishing line was still ten yards away they flashed past the other crew and came in victorious by half a length.

CHAPTER IX

TOMMY FLANDERS TRIES A TRICK

"HURRAH! We win the four-oared race!"

"My! but isn't that a close finish?"

"Here is where Colby Hall puts it over Longley!"

The yells from the Colby cadets and their friends were deafening. Many of the girls from Clearwater Hall joined in, and Ruth became so excited she grabbed Martha and Mary and kissed them both.

"I'm so glad your cousins helped win that race!" she said.

"I'm going down to see them come in," said Mary, and quickly made her way out of the crowd of girls, followed by her cousin.

"I'm going down too!" came from Alice Strobell.

"So am I!" put in Annie Larkins, for these two girls had often been in company with Andy and Randy, and the four were quite chummy.

Of course Jack and Fred had to be on hand to see the winning oarsmen come in, and they

were first among the crowd to clap their cousins and the others of the crew on the back and congratulate them.

"Some race, I'll say!" declared the young major. "I'm proud of you!"

"I made them save their strength for the final quarter," answered Walt Baxter, in reply to a question from several persons. "I knew Longley couldn't keep up the pace they set."

"Oh, this is glorious!" burst out Alice Strobell, as she and Annie Larkins came up and shook hands with the twins.

Then May came forward to congratulate Spouter, and Dan Soppinger and Walt Baxter were not forgotten. There was a general hubbub and a general handshaking which lasted for fully ten minutes.

In the meantime the Longley crew had returned to their dock. Here they found a number of cadets and others to sympathize with them. Tommy Flanders looked "mad enough to chew nails," as one of the Colby cadets reported later on.

"It wasn't a fair race," growled Flanders. "They tried to foul us going around the island."

"Of course they tried to foul us," put in Billy Sands.

This report, however, was not true. In fact, it was proved by a number of eye witnesses that if

there had been any fault at all in rounding the island it lay with the Longley crew and not with the cadets from Colby Hall. Otherwise the race had been a perfectly fair one from start to finish.

"I guess Tommy Flanders will sing in a little lower tone of voice after this," was Fred's comment, when the excitement had subsided a little. "My, but I bet he feels sick!"

"He made a mistake by blowing so hard beforehand," answered Jack. "Now our crew can blow and have something to blow about."

There was no doubt but that the Longley following was very much disappointed at the showing so far made. Of course, two of their cadets had won the singles, but the four-oared race was considered much more important. Even the blaring out of the brass band did not dispel their gloom. However, a little later it was time to get ready for the eight-oared race, and then the spirits of the Longley boys seemed to recover.

"Here is where we'll show Colby Hall what's what!" said one of the crowd. "After all, it's the eight-oared race that counts. The others are only of secondary importance."

"Sour grapes!" yelled one of the Colby cadets who overheard this remark. "You know the four-oared race is almost as important as the one to come off."

As soon as they could do so, the Rover twins and their chums who had won the four-oared race put their shell away, had a rub-down, donned their uniforms, and then joined the other cadets. The Longley crew also put their shell away, and then Tommy Flanders and his cronies seemed to disappear.

"I guess they don't want to be questioned about the race," remarked Ruth to Martha, when they chanced to see the Longley boys hurrying off.

"Well, it's a bitter pill for anybody to swallow," answered Jack's sister. "No one likes to be defeated."

Flanders, Halliday, Sands and a number of others had come over to the Haven Point side of the lake in a private motor-boat belonging to an old boatman named Nat Durgin. The craft was one that had been on the lake for a great number of years, being used for all sorts of odd jobs.

"Come on! We'll watch the last race from out on the lake," said Flanders. "I'm not going back in that bunch to be laughed at."

"Just my idea," answered Paul Halliday, lighting a cigarette.

They had hired the motor-boat for the afternoon, so they could go where they pleased. Durgin himself ran the craft, not caring to trust it in

the hands of any one else. He was a nice old fellow, although a bit lazy, and nearly everybody around the lake knew him.

At the appointed time the two eight-oared shells flashed into appearance, each manned by a sturdy-looking crew and a coxswain. For this race there had been chosen some of the best oarsmen at both Colby and Longley.

"Here they come!"

"Now for another fine race!"

"Oh, I hope we win this one too!" cried Fred to his cousins.

"So do I," answered Randy quickly. "That will show Longley they are not so much, even if they did take the singles."

There was a wild cheering on all sides and the band blared forth merrily. In the meantime the official motor-boats darted here, there and everywhere trying to keep the other boats off the course. This was not so easy, especially for the sailing craft, because the wind was freshening slightly, and those on the sailing boats wanted, of course, to keep as close as possible in order to see everything that took place. At last, however, everything was in readiness, and at the report of a pistol the two crews started off as one, side by side.

"A perfect start!" cried Colonel Colby.

"I never saw a better," put in old Si Crews.

The eight-oared race was to be about three miles in length, taking a course that was triangular in shape and bringing the boats at one point close to the Clearwater Hall shore.

During the first leg of the triangle the shells kept side by side, neither boat gaining more than a foot over the other.

"Gee, but they're both keeping at it!" cried Jack, who was watching through a pair of field-glasses he had brought along.

"They're both out for blood, and no mistake," was Spouter's comment.

"Maybe Gif is holding our boys back," suggested Fatty Hendry. "He knows how to manage them if anybody does."

"I heard Si Crews telling him to watch their wind," came from Dan Soppinger. "That's what helped us. Walt didn't crowd us until he knew that we could hold out; and then he drove us for fair. If that race had been a hundred feet longer I'd have keeled over," he added, with a shake of his head.

On and on swept the two shells, and then it was seen that Colby Hall was slowly going ahead, first a foot, then a yard, then two yards.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" yelled Fred, throwing his cap into the air. "Now our boys are doing it!"

"Colby! Colby!" was the cry that swept across the water. "Go it, boys! Go it!"

"Pull, Longley, pull!" was the cry of the opposition. "You can do it! Pull for all you're worth!"

And then there was such a hubbub that hardly a word of what was said could be understood. As before, the horns and rattles added to the din, and if the brass band was playing nobody heard it.

Gif was certainly handling his crew superbly, but the coxswain of the Longley oarsmen also understood his business, and now he increased the stroke just a little and then slowly but surely Longley began to creep up an inch at a time. Now it was less than a yard behind, now only a foot, and now the two shells were once more bow and bow.

"That's the way to do it, Longley! Hurrah!"

"Keep it up! Make Colby take your wash!"

There had been a moment of intense suspense and silence, but now another roar went forth as the hopes of Longley revived. Everybody was again on his feet and all sorts of objects were thrown into the air, many of them going overboard into the lake. And now the racers had rounded the second mark and had but little more than a mile to go. This was close to the shore at Clearwater Hall, and many people lining the

bank were on hand to encourage the young oarsmen.

Longley had crept ahead a full yard, but now Gif spoke quietly but earnestly to those under him. His body swayed back and forward a little quicker and with a longer motion, and the oarsmen caught the swing, their bodies moving with the precision of a machine. The long eight-oared shell seemed fairly to leap from the water, and in a twinkling the lead of the rival shell was cut down and Colby shot ahead.

"Hurrah! Look at that!" was the cry. "Colby leads!"

"Come on, you duffers!" yelled Dan Soppinger. "Come on! The race is yours!"

"We're waiting for you with open arms!" screamed Fatty Hendry.

As the two shells swept on with less than three quarters of a mile still to be covered, the sailboats and motor-boats began to crowd in behind to get a better view of the finish. This caused something of a mix-up, in which two sloops came to grief, one losing her bowsprit. But to this accident nobody just then paid any attention.

Among the motor-boats to come up on the outer side of the course was that containing Tommy Flanders and his cronies. The fellow who the season before had been batted out of the box and

"HURRAH! LOOK AT THAT! COLBY LEADS!"

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who had just now lost in the four-oared race, was so savage and gloomy he was almost ready to do anything. Privately he had bet not only on the race which he had helped to lose, but he had also bet rather heavily on the race now taking place. Already he could see all his spending money being swept away and himself in debt to several of his fellow cadets.

"Hi! let me run the boat a little, Durgin," he said suddenly to the old boatman. "I want to get a good view of this finish."

"I'll run her. Just tell me where you want to go," answered Nat Durgin. Even though the motor-boat was rather old, she had been newly painted and he was rather choice of her. He knew that other boats would crowd in and he did not wish to get into any mix-up and have his craft scratched up.

But Flanders would not listen, and crowding the old boatman to one side he seized the wheel of the motor-boat and sent the craft ahead almost directly for the spot for which the two racing shells were heading.

"Hi! Hi! Don't go too close!" cried old Durgin, in alarm. "Don't interfere with the race!"

"I know what I'm doing!" answered Tommy Flanders. "You let me alone!"

It was now plain to Tommy's cronies that he was up to some trick. The shell closest to the motor-boat was that belonging to Colby Hall, and now it was less than twenty yards away.

"That's right, Tommy!" chuckled Paul Halliday. "Give 'em a whole lot of wash! Soak 'em good!"

"That's what I'm going to do," hissed Flanders through his set teeth. And then he drove the motor-boat still closer.

"Get away from there! Get away from there!" was the cry from one of the motor-boats that was trying to keep the course clear.

"Go to grass!" muttered Billy Sands. "Drive her in, Tommy! Give 'em all the wash you can!"

"You'll hit their oars, you young fool! Keep away from there," suddenly yelled old Nat Durgin, and then he tried to push Tommy Flanders away from the wheel.

"Let me alone!" said Flanders, and began to struggle.

Nat Durgin's blood was up. He did not like Flanders or his cronies any too well, and they had beat him down in the price to be paid for the use of the motor-boat. Without ceremony the old man slapped Flanders heavily in the face, then shut off the motor and turned the craft out into the lake.

"That's the stuff, Durgin!" shouted a man from one of the boats lying nearby. "Throw that young fool overboard!"

"That's right! Give him a bath!" came from another boat.

"Say! what do you mean by hitting me?" roared Tommy Flanders, in a rage. "You keep your hands off of me!"

"And you keep your hands off the wheel of this boat!" returned old Durgin sternly.

"I won't pay a cent for the use of this boat!" snapped Tommy.

"You say another word and I'll have you locked up for disorderly conduct," answered the old boatman heatedly. "You sit down and behave yourself. I'm running this boat, and you're not going to break up that race."

"I wasn't going to break up the race," muttered Flanders in a sudden panic, for he realized that he might get into serious trouble if a report was made of what he had really attempted to do.

"We'll see about this after the race is over," answered Durgin.

CHAPTER X

AFTER THE RACES

"Say, boys, this is going to be another close race," declared Jack.

"My, see the boats swarming behind the shells!" was Andy's comment.

"Look at that motor-boat, will you?" came quickly from Spouter. "Gee Christopher! what are they trying to do?"

At once cries arose on all sides when it was seen that one motor-boat was coming dangerously close to the racecourse.

"It's old Nat Durgin's boat!" exclaimed Jack, after looking through the fieldglasses. "And what do you know about this? Tommy Flanders is at the wheel!"

A moment later there were exclamations from a dozen or more individuals as Durgin was seen to cast Flanders aside and take command of the craft. Then it was seen to veer away and was lost to sight behind the sails of a small sloop.

"Here they come! And almost bow and bow!"

"Colby is ahead!"

"No! Longley is ahead!"

"It's a tie!"

The excitement was now tremendous as it was seen that Longley had crept up and was now bow and bow with the other shell.

"Pull, Colby! Pull!" roared the cadets from that institution. "Pull!"

And the cadets from Colby urged by Gif pulled as they had never pulled before, their eyes staring from their sockets and their breath coming laboredly. But Longley was also pulling, although now the terrific pace was beginning to tell upon the oarsmen from the rival academy. They were all but in, and their coxswain urged them to greater efforts in vain. Now the finishing line was in sight, and it was then that Gif broke out in a wild appeal to those he was directing.

"Now then, boys! Every ounce that's left in you! Go to it! Make her jump out of the water! Make her jump good!" And with every word his body swayed back and forth and the oarsmen responded with every bit of vital force left in their spent bodies. The shell leaped ahead, while at the same moment those in the other shell slowed up, being unable to keep up the terrific pace.

"It's Colby's race! It's Colby's race!" was the yell, and it was the truth. Colby shot on and

on and then crossed the finishing line a length and three feet to the good.

Then it was that the cadets of Colby Hall and their many friends rent the shore of Clearwater Lake with their cries of exaltation—cries that went echoing back and forth through the hills in the distance. Jack and the others went nearly mad with joy, throwing up their caps and hugging each other. Randy began to do a jig while Andy climbed a flagstaff on the dock and went twisting around it at arm's length. It was a moment never to be forgotten and one that would live long in the annals of the school on the Rick Rack River.

"Three cheers for Gif Garrison!" called the young major of the battalion, and they were given with a will, many of the girls from Clearwater Hall joining in.

Then all the others who had taken part in the various races were cheered. Many ran down to where the eight-oared shell was now coming in, and as soon as the crew had landed Gif was grabbed by his many friends and hoisted up on a pair of sturdy shoulders and marched around the dock.

"Speech! Speech!" cried someone. But at this Gif shook his head.

"Not just now, boys. I'm too nearly in. Some

other time. I'm mighty glad we won the race. Thank you." And that was all he would say.

Coming on top of the winning of the four-oared race, it was certainly a great triumph, and for the time being the loss in the singles was forgotten. The local band was forced to lead a march around the town in which practically every cadet from Colby Hall and many of the girls from Clearwater Hall, as well as some of the town people, participated. Some had flags, while others carried their horns and rattles, and they made the welkin ring with their cheers.

"Bonfires to-night!" chuckled Andy. "Oh, boy! but we'll have some time, won't we?"

"Right-o!" responded his twin.

Encouraged by the fact that the boat races would attract a large number of visitors to Haven Point, the owner of an amusement park on the outskirts had made arrangements for a special picnic with a number of attractions. The admission to this park was free, and the cadets from both academies, as well as the girls from Clearwater Hall, were invited to visit the place.

"Let's go down and see what's doing," suggested Spouter, after the excitement attending the races was over. "Mr. Falstein owns the park, you know, and he has always been so nice to us we

ought to encourage him." The man he mentioned was the owner of the moving picture theater in the town and most of the boys knew him well.

"I wouldn't mind," answered Randy.

"Don't you feel tired after the race?" questioned Jack.

"Oh, I'm rested now."

"We've got two hours before we're due at the Hall," put in Andy. "Come on."

The upshot of this was that the boys invited the girls to accompany them, and after receiving permission from one of the teachers to do so the crowd set off for the park, which was located in a large grove of trees less than quarter of a mile away.

They found a happy crowd already collected, indulging in swinging, the use of a merry-go-round, and half a dozen other amusements. A small band was playing, and half a dozen couples were indulging in dancing on a small platform.

"Let's go on the merry-go-round!" cried Andy. "Come on!" and he caught Alice Strobell by the arm.

"I'll go if Annie will go," answered Alice.

"All right, come on, Annie," said Randy, and the two couples lost no time in getting on the wooden horses, which speedily whirled them around and around.

A number of the others followed, including the Rover girls and Gif and Spouter. Ruth said she did not care for such a ride, and she and Jack wandered off for a walk with May and Fred behind them.

In a short while the amusement park began to fill up and there were shrieks of laughter from the young folks and merry music from the band. Not a few of the visitors were from Longley Academy, bent on having a good time in spite of their defeats on the lake.

"I should think they'd want to go home," said Dan Soppinger, who was present.

"Oh, well, you can't blame them for wanting some consolation," answered Walt Baxter. And then Walt added quickly: "I think we ought to treat 'em as nicely as possible, Dan."

"Oh, sure! we'll treat 'em all right enough," was the ready reply. "I like some of those fellows first rate, even if they do go to Longley. It's only such cads as Flanders that I can't bear."

While Jack and Fred were strolling along with the two girls from Clearwater Hall they were much surprised to see Tommy Flanders, Paul Halliday and Billy Sands coming along a bypath with Codfish Stowell between them. The latter did not for the instant notice our friends, who were screened somewhat by bushes.

"I want that money, Tommy. I've got to have it," they heard Codfish say in a pleading tone. "Can't you let me have it to-day?"

"I can't let you have a cent," grumbled Flanders. "Didn't I tell you I lost every dollar of my allowance on the races?"

"Yes, but you promised me that five dollars last week," went on the sneak of Colby Hall. "You said you would be sure to give it to me."

"Oh, why don't you shut up whining?" burst out Billy Sands. "You had more fun out of that affair than we did. I don't believe you ought to make Tommy pay for anything like that."

"I don't care! I did it because you wanted me to and because you promised me the five dollars," went on Codfish stubbornly. "I think it's awful mean that you don't give it to me."

"Oh, give us a rest!" growled Flanders, and then the four cadets passed on.

"Well, what do you think of that?" ejaculated Fred, when the quartet were out of hearing. "I didn't know Codfish was hobnobbing with Tommy Flanders."

"Neither did I," returned Jack. "I suppose he got acquainted through Sands and Halliday. He might rather leave that bunch alone."

"I saw that Stowell boy with Tommy Flanders in town some weeks ago," remarked May. "They

were in the drug store having some soda. I remember it very well from a remark that Flanders dropped. I thought it was awfully funny."

"What remark was that, May?" questioned Jack curiously.

"They were talking about something Stowell was going to do, and Flanders said, 'Use a pillow-case or a flour bag and it will be all right.' And a minute later I heard him say, 'They'll look like Negroes,' and he laughed."

"What's that?" came from Jack and Fred simultaneously, and they exchanged glances.

"Why, what's the matter?" cried Spouter's cousin in astonishment.

"Tell us about that again, May," went on the young major, and the girl repeated her story.

"That solves the whole mystery!" declared Jack.

"It's as plain as daylight," responded the young captain.

"Will you kindly tell us what you're talking about?" remarked Ruth, in wonder.

"I sure will, Ruth. We weren't going to say anything at first because the joke was on us, but now I think the joke is going to be on somebody else," replied Jack. And thereupon he gave the particulars of how he and his cousins had been doused with a bag of soot.

"Of all things!" burst out May. "And do you suppose it was that trick Tommy Flanders was talking about to Stowell?"

"Sure as shooting, May," answered Fred. "Don't you see how it all fits together? You heard Tommy tell Stowell to use a pillowcase or a flour bag. That was to conceal his face. Then he said it would make us look like Negroes, and it certainly did. Then along comes Codfish pleading to Flanders to pay him the five dollars he had promised him for doing something. And then Sands suggesting that Codfish should call it square because he got more fun out of it than they did!"

"It certainly is a clear case," broke in Jack. "Flanders and maybe Sands and Halliday got Codfish to play that joke on us, and they promised him five dollars for doing it."

"Let's go after Codfish right now!" exclaimed the young captain, his eyes blazing.

"Oh, dear, don't get into a fight!" burst out May, catching him by the arm.

"No use of starting a row here, Fred," put in Jack quickly. "We can catch Codfish to-night and Tommy Flanders some other time. We don't want to disgrace Colby Hall while this celebration is going on. Those Longley fellows would like nothing better than to publish the fact that we

had started a rumpus on the day of the races."

"What an awful boy Tommy Flanders must be," murmured Ruth, "to hire another to play such a trick as that! And then just think of how he tried to spoil that last race!"

The cadets could not, however, resist the temptation to look around for Flanders, Halliday, Sands and Codfish. They saw the four having some ice cream, but then Flanders, Halliday and Sands went off by themselves and Codfish disappeared.

After that Jack and Fred and the girls continued their walk. Jack learned from Ruth that her father was steadily improving in health, but that he was as much worried as ever over the loss of the book of formulas.

"And old Uncle Barney is worried too over the loss of his money," went on the girl. "I'm afraid this loss may revive the old hard feeling there was between my father and my uncle."

"It would certainly be too bad if that happened, Ruth," answered the young major soberly. He knew that the girl referred to a very bitter quarrel which had existed between old Uncle Barney and Frederic Stevenson, a quarrel the particulars of which have already been narrated in "The Rover Boys on Snowshoe Island."

Presently one of the teachers from Clearwater

Hall began to round up the girls from that institution, and then the boys had to bid good-by to their friends.

"I suppose we might as well be getting back to school," said Jack, as Andy and Randy came up. "What do you say?"

"Suits me," responded Randy.

"We've got something to tell you fellows," put in Fred eagerly. "Something worth knowing, I'll tell you!" and thereupon the two young officers gave the particulars of what they had learned concerning the trick played upon them.

"Beeswax and grasshoppers!" ejaculated Andy. "And to think Codfish was guilty and we never suspected him!"

"He certainly had nerve to play a trick like that!" returned Randy. "I didn't think the little sneak had backbone enough to do it."

"He was out after the five dollars Flanders promised him," answered Jack. "You know Codfish was always shy on pocket money. That's the reason he used to toady to Nappy Martell and those other rascals."

"We ought to give it to Codfish good and plenty to-night," said Andy.

"We will!" responded his brother. "Just wait and see!"

CHAPTER XI

CELEBRATING THE VICTORY

A LITTLE later found the Rover boys, accompanied by half a dozen of their friends, bound for Colby Hall. It was rather late, and they hurried along with all possible speed.

"No parade before supper, for which I am thankful," remarked Jack.

"And supper is to be half an hour late," added Randy.

"And best of all, no studying to-night," broke in Andy. "Oh, my! but won't we have some fun!"

"We've got to catch Codfish, Andy. Don't forget that," put in Randy.

"Forget it!" answered the fun-loving Rover. "Why, you couldn't make me forget it for a million dollars. That boy is going to have a lesson he'll remember as long as he lives. Every time I think how he exploded that bag of soot on us I get madder than ever."

"And after all we did for him when those

bullies were misusing him!" came from Jack. "He certainly is a pill and then some!"

"Just the same, I suppose we've got to be careful that we don't get into any hot water," remarked Fred soberly. "We can't afford to injure our reputations as officers, Jack."

"Why can't you two officers leave this whole affair to Randy and me?" questioned Andy. "You just go off and forget all about it and take in what happens."

"I'll see about that," answered the young major. He realized the point his cousin was trying to make and yet he was angry enough to give the sneak a sound thrashing.

The boys had walked on a distance of a quarter of a mile and were coming out along the lake front when suddenly Spouter, who was walking ahead with Dan Soppinger, uttered an exclamation.

"Look down there at the dock!" he cried. "Looks like a fight going on!"

"That's what it is!" exclaimed Gif.

"Why, it's Tommy Flanders and his crowd and they are beating up old Nat Durgin!" came quickly from Fred.

"I'll bet they got into a row about hiring that motor-boat," remarked Andy. "Let's go down and see what happens."

"They have no right to beat up poor old Durgin," returned Jack. "He's not a half-bad sort, even though he is rather lazy."

The crowd of cadets hurried their steps and soon came closer to the scene of the quarrel. They had seen Tommy Flanders strike the old man in the face, and now Nat Durgin responded with a blow on the shoulder. Then Flanders jumped in, followed by Billy Sands and Paul Halliday, and the three boys from Longley Academy bore the old boatman to the ground.

"Stop that!" cried Jack. "Let up on him!" He had leaped to the front and caught Tommy Flanders by the arm. Almost at the same instant Gif and Spouter grabbed Sands and Halliday.

"Take 'em off! Take 'em off!" cried old Durgin. He was all but winded by his exertions. Evidently the quarrel had been going on for some time.

"Huh! what do you want here, Jack Rover?" demanded Tommy Flanders sullenly. "You keep your hands out of this!"

"You let Durgin alone, Flanders," answered the young major.

"What's the meaning of the row, anyhow?" demanded Gif.

"You're a fine bunch of cadets to pile on an old man three at a time!" sneered Spouter.

The three boys from Longley Academy looked anything but comfortable as they saw themselves surrounded by the crowd from Colby Hall. They stepped back from where Nat Durgin lay, and Randy and Dan Soppinger assisted the old boatman to his feet. Near by was Durgin's pipe, and Ned Lowe picked this up and gave it to him.

"I'll have the law on you for this, you see if I don't!" roared Durgin, now that he saw that friends were at hand. "I'll teach you young whelps to knock me down!"

"You hit me first," retorted Flanders. "Don't forget that! I've got my friends to prove it!"

"So I did hit you first," answered Durgin readily. "And you deserved it too—wanting to break up that last shell race!"

"Did he really try to break up that race?" questioned Gif eagerly. "I saw him at the wheel of your motor-boat when we were on the home-stretch."

"That's what he did!"

"It's not so!" blustered Flanders.

"It is so! He wanted to steer the boat and I told him I'd do it. Then he shoved me aside and grabbed the wheel and steered right for your shell. Then I slapped him in the face, turned off the power, and steered my boat away from the

course. A whole lot of people on the other boats saw it."

"That was a fine piece of business, Flanders!" said Gif contemptuously. "A fine piece of business, trying to spoil our chance to win! You ought to be hooted out of Longley Academy for it."

"Oh, say, Garrison, don't get so smart," put in Paul Halliday. "Tommy wasn't going to run into your shell, or anything like it. He simply wanted to get close so he could see what was going on. All the boats were crowding in."

"I don't want anything from you, Halliday. I've got your number, and always have had," returned the cadet who was at the head of the Colby Hall athletic committee, and who had been the coxswain of the eight. "I know you thoroughly."

"We don't belong at Colby Hall any more, and you've got no right to say anything to us," remarked Billy Sands.

"Well, we'll take the right when you knock down a man as you did Durgin," came from Spouter.

"They haven't paid me for the use of my boat, either," complained the old boatman. "That's what started the row here. They said they would pay me right after the races."

"I'll bet I know why they didn't pay up," broke out Andy, with a grin. "Most likely they lost all their pocket money betting the wrong way."

"Hi, you shut up, Rover! You make me sick!" cried Tommy Flanders, glaring at Andy sullenly.

A wordy war followed, lasting several minutes. Then Nat Durgin walked to where his motor-boat was tied up and sprang aboard the craft.

"You fellows pay me what you owe me or I'll have the law on you," he called out, and then he added to the boys from Colby Hall: "Much obliged to you fellows for what you done for me."

"Hi! Wait!" cried Halliday. "You've got to take us across the lake!"

"I won't take you nowhere," bellowed Nat Durgin. "I'm done with you! But you've got to pay me what you owe me or I'll do what I said before—I'll have the law on you," and with this parting shot he started up his motor and moved slowly away.

"Now see what you did!" cried Billy Sands in anger, as he faced the Colby Hall cadets. "How are we going to get back to school? All the other boats have left."

"That's your affair, not ours," answered Jack. And then he continued as he stepped closer to the trio of discontents. "My cousins and I ought to

give the whole three of you a sound thrashing."

"We know what you got Codfish Stowell to do," broke in Andy. "Some day we'll square that account, and don't you forget it!"

"Hi! you fellows make me tired," grumbled Flanders, and then he moved off, followed by his cronies. At a safe distance he turned around and shook his fist at the Colby Hall cadets. "You just wait! I'll get square some day!"

"Gee! what a meek and innocent little lamb he is," was Spouter's comment, as the boys hurried for the Hall.

"Say," put in Phil Franklin, who was in the crowd but who had taken no part in the discussion with their rivals, "did they get Codfish to play that trick on you?"

"Yes, if you must know it," answered Randy.

"But don't let Codfish know about this," broke in Andy quickly. "He thinks his secret is safe. We just learned about it during this afternoon and we want to surprise him."

"All right, then, mum's the word," returned Phil, and the others said the same.

On account of the incident at the lakeshore the boys were somewhat late in reaching the Hall. Snopper Duke, one of the professors, frowned a little at this, but otherwise no comment was made. It was felt that this was a festival night and

that the cadets ought to be allowed to do very much as they pleased.

In anticipation of a possible victory a number of the boys had collected a mass of boxes and barrels and other wood for fires, and shortly after the evening meal these beacons began to blaze along the shore of the Rick Rack. In the meantime the cadets donned their old uniforms and then one after another came forth to shout and sing and cut up generally.

"After such a victory they deserve a good time," was Colonel Colby's comment. The master of the school had not forgotten his own good times while he had been a cadet at Putnam Hall. "Let the boys cut loose, Captain Dale, so long as they don't do any real harm."

Of course, "Shout" Plunger, the school janitor, who was very deaf and who had to be shouted at in order to hear, came in for quite some horseplay, as did also Bob Nixon and Si Crews. Shout was made to stand on a box and sing, which he did in a queer cracked voice that brought forth roars of laughter. Bob Nixon had to tell a funny story. He had been warned that he might be made to do this, so had prepared himself by digesting the contents of an old joke book, and therefore got off a number of jokes that most of the boys had heard a dozen times.

"Now then, everybody in a grand march!" cried Dan Soppinger gayly, and then the cadets began what they called a serpentine hop, which consisted of a long line of cadets winding in and out around the bonfires and the trees on the edge of the parade ground. A few had torches, and others musical instruments consisting of banjos, ukuleles, mouth harmonicas, cornets, tin horns, clappers and various other things more or less melodious.

Henry Stowell was standing somewhat apart from those who were taking part in the serpentine hop when suddenly he found himself seized from behind and somebody whispered in his ear.

"One of the professors wants to see you up in your room right away, Stowell," said the person behind him. "Don't delay! It's very important." Then before the sneak could turn around to see who had delivered the message the unknown person had slipped behind a nearby tree and disappeared in the darkness.

"What can they want of me now?" murmured Codfish to himself. "I haven't been doing anything." Then he heaved a sigh. "Maybe I'll be called down for being seen in company with Flanders and those two cadets who left Colby to go to Longley. It was a mistake for me to be seen with those chaps; but I wanted my money.

If it's that I'll tell the professor Flanders owes me five dollars. He can't find fault with me for wanting it back."

Leaving the river front, Stowell hurried into the school, which was now practically deserted, the other cadets being out at the celebration and many of the professors and the others watching proceedings. He sped up the broad stairway and through the corridor and then opened the door to his own room. He had expected that the room would be lit up, and he was surprised to find it in darkness.

"Hello! Anybody here?" he questioned abruptly.

Codfish had scarcely spoken when the door slammed shut behind him, cutting out nearly all the light coming from the corridor. Then, of a sudden, the sneak found himself caught from behind and something was clapped over his mouth so that he could not utter any outcry. His assailants said not a word, but bound his hands behind him and then fixed a gag in his mouth so that he could breathe but could not utter a word. Then he heard the door locked, and a moment later the lights in the room were turned on and Codfish saw a sight that almost froze the blood in his veins.

CHAPTER XII

SETTLING WITH CODFISH

Six figures surrounded Stowell, each pointing a menacing finger at him. Each figure had a white sheet draped around it and a white towel pinned fantastically around the head and face with just a small slit for the eyes.

While Codfish stared in alarm at the figures, the fingers were slowly elevated until they pointed at something suspended from the ceiling; and it was then that the sneak of the school began to squirm in terror. A cord ran from a ring in the ceiling, one end of which was held in the hand of one of the masked figures. The other end of the cord hung down directly over the bed upon which Stowell had been pushed. The end of the string was wound around the tail of a green snake all of three feet long, a snake that wiggled from side to side as it dangled in mid-air.

Codfish would have screamed in terror had not the gag prevented him. He attempted to leap from the bed, but the masked figures were too quick for him. Two held his hands on one side

of the bed while two more held his feet on the other. The figure having hold of the string gently lowered it until the head of the wiggling reptile was less than a foot away from Stowell.

"Lie still!" was the stern command to the hapless youth. "Lie still, or we'll lower the snake upon you! Lie still, and you shall not be harmed."

At these words Stowell for a few seconds longer continued to struggle, but then suddenly grew quiet, although still shaking with fright.

"The snake is deadly poisonous," said another one of the masked figures in a voice that was hoarse and low. "Beware! Move, and one sting from the snake will finish you! Beware!"

At this Stowell began to mumble something, his face working convulsively. At once one of the masked figures whispered in the ear of another.

"Maybe he can't breathe with that gag. We don't want to smother him."

"Ask him if he'll keep quiet if we remove the gag," was the low reply.

Thereupon one of the figures came a bit closer and, pointing a finger at the gag, spoke again.

"Henry Stowell," it said solemnly, "listen! If we remove the gag from your mouth do you

promise faithfully that you will not cry out? If so, nod your head."

There was a second of silence and then Codfish nodded his head vigorously.

"If you cry out do you give us full permission to give you a licking for so doing?" asked another one of the masked figures in a deep bass voice which, however, sounded remarkably like the tones generally used by Andy Rover.

Again there was a second of silence, and then Stowell nodded once more, but this time not so vigorously as before.

"It is well!" came from another of the masked figures. "Remember your promise, Stowell! Remember!" Thereupon the gag was removed from the sneak's mouth, but his hands were still kept tied behind him.

"Take that snake away! Please take that snake away!" were Codfish's first words as soon as he could catch his breath. "Don't let it bite me!"

"Remain on the bed, Codfish," was the stern reply. "Remain on the bed if you want to keep away from the snake."

"It is the wonderful noobokoliki snake," came in weird tones from one of the masked figures. "The educated snake belonging to the secret order of the Kalipops. He'll not harm our members,

but he will strike at an outsider and strike to kill. Beware!"

Perhaps Stowell did not believe what was said, but he saw that he was in the hands of the masked cadets and he saw the wriggling snake tied to the end of the suspended string, and he did not feel that he could take any chances.

"Please let me go! Please!" he muttered in a half sob. "I haven't done anything! Please take that snake away!"

Thereupon the six figures ranged themselves in a circle around the cadet on the bed, and each once more pointed a menacing finger at him.

"Henry Stowell, you are a sneak!" came from one of the figures.

"Henry Stowell, you are a sneak!" came from another of the figures. And thus the accusation went around the entire circle.

"I—I—don't—know what you mean," stammered Codfish. And now he grew pale and red by turns, his eyes shifting from the masked figures to the wriggling snake and then back again to the accusing cadets.

"You do know!" came simultaneously from all the others in the room. "You are a sneak!"

"You are a disgrace to Colby Hall!"

"We ought to give you the licking of your life!"

"Stop! Stop! Please stop!" pleaded Codfish.

He was growing more and more alarmed. "Let me tell you something. I wasn't going to say anything about it until the end of the term, but I might as well tell you. I'm going to leave this school. Next term I'm going to Longley Academy."

"Thank fortune for that!" came in a murmur from one of the masked figures. It was Andy who spoke.

"The best news I've heard in a year of Sundays," murmured his twin in return.

The news that Codfish was going to leave Colby Hall came as something of a surprise to all of the masked figures, and at a signal from one of them they moved to a corner of the room for a whispered conversation.

"The poor little beggar is scared stiff," came in low tones from Dan Soppinger. "We might as well let him go."

"I'd like to pay him back for the time he reported me to Captain Dale," put in Ned Lowe.

"Yes, and he ought to be made to suffer for reporting me to Professor Duke," put in Fatty Hendry.

"Yes, and for the things he did for Gabe Werner against us," added Walt Baxter. "If ever a sneak deserved a sound licking, it's Codfish."

"Well, we might let up on some of the things we were going to do," whispered Randy.

"Just the same, I think he ought to be labeled for what he is," came quickly from Andy.

"Oh, yes, we can label him all right enough," said several of the others quickly.

With one eye on the dangling snake, Codfish had watched the masked figures with the other, and now, seeing himself unnoticed for the instant, the sneak slipped from the bed and started in a wild dash for the door, the key to which was still in the lock.

"No, you don't!" cried Randy, and caught Codfish just as he was in the act of backing up to the door to unlock it with one of his tied hands. "Not just yet!" And thereupon all the lads pounced upon the sneak and threw him on the floor.

"Fix him up so we can label him!" cried Andy. "He deserves it! Hurry up before someone comes!"

In a twinkling Codfish found his hands untied. Then his coat was taken from him, followed by his shirt. Four of the boys held him down face front while two others approached with a can of red paint and a small brush.

"A sneak you are, a sneak you have always been and a sneak we are going to label you," were

the words uttered, and in a few seconds more the word SNEAK was painted across Codfish's shoulders. Then he was turned over and the same word, SNEAK, was painted across his breast.

"Now then, into the clothes closet with him," was the next order. "And remember, Codfish, if you tell a word of this to any of the professors we'll lick you within an inch of your life," was the caution given to the frightened cadet.

"I—I won't say a word," blubbered the sneak. "Please let me alone!"

"We're going to put you in the closet and keep you there," said one of the masked figures. Then the figure turned to the others. "We'll take turns at watching him, fifteen minutes each. Here is a club I brought along. If he attempts to open the door of the closet and come out, knock him in the head."

"Right, Most Honorable Ruler!" came from the other masked figures, with a profound bow.

"How long must I stay in the closet?" blubbered Codfish.

"We'll let you know when to come out," was the short reply; and thereupon he was shoved back into his own clothes closet and the door was closed upon him.

"Number Three, you are to stay here for fifteen

minutes," was the loud command. "Then Number Six will relieve you, and after that Number Two."

"It is well, Most Exalted Ruler!" answered several of the other cadets. Then the door to the corridor was unlocked and one of them peered out cautiously.

"The coast is clear," whispered Randy. "Come on! Let's cut for it!"

"What are you going to do with that paper snake, Andy?" questioned Dan Soppinger, with a chuckle.

"We'll leave that here for Codfish to play with after he gets over his fright," answered the fun-loving Rover. And then he went on in a loud voice: "Now then, Number Three, be on guard and have your club ready!" And thereupon one after another all of the masked figures stole softly from the room, closing the door behind them. They sped to the rooms occupied by the Rovers where they lost no time in getting rid of the sheets and the towels.

"I'll bet he won't dare come out of that clothes closet for a long time," was Ned Lowe's comment.

"Well, let him take his time," chuckled Randy. "It will give that red paint a chance to dry."

"I hope the lesson will do some good," answered

Walt Baxter. "He's about the worst sneak I ever heard of."

"It's too bad we didn't have a chance to try those other stunts on him," came from Dan Soppinger. "Having his head shaved would have done him good."

"Well, we're better off as it is," answered Randy. "If we had shaved him maybe it might have gotten us into trouble. As it is, I don't believe he'll dare say a word about it."

"We didn't treat him half as badly as he treated us," answered Andy, who could not forget the throwing of the bag of soot.

The boys had come up from the campus by way of the fire-escape on the back of the building, and now they lost no time in going below by the same means. They mingled with their fellow cadets, who were doing a war dance around the various bonfires.

"How about it? Did you see Codfish?" questioned Fred, as he caught sight of the twins.

"We did!" was the quick reply. "And we've got news," and thereupon they related as briefly as they could what had happened in Stowell's room and what the sneak had said.

"He can't leave Colby Hall any too quick for me," answered the young captain of Company C.

"Halliday, Sands and that bunch are welcome to him."

The festivities along the Rick Rack continued until after ten o'clock. Then, however, the bonfires gradually died down and one after another the cadets entered the Hall and went up to their various rooms.

In the meantime Codfish, half scared to death, remained in the clothes closet for the best part of half an hour. Then, finding he could get no reply from the person supposed to be outside on guard, he timidly ventured to open the door and peer out. Then he came forth into the bedroom, to find the lights still turned on but the apartment vacant save for the snake, which now rested on the bed.

"Ugh! What am I going to do with that thing?" the sneak murmured in new fright. Then he ran to the doorway and, donning his coat, rushed down the stairs. In the lower corridor he ran into Snopper Duke.

"Oh, Professor! Professor! There is a snake on my bed!" he wailed. "What shall I do about it? I don't want to be bit!"

"A snake!" repeated the professor. "How extraordinary! How did it get there, Stowell?"

"I—I—some—boys— That is, I can't really tell you, sir," said the sneak, with a shiver. He

had been about to explain, but suddenly remembered the whipping that had been promised to him if he played the sneak again. "But the snake is there, sir, and I don't know what to do!"

"I'll investigate," said Snopper Duke, and marched up the stairs and into the room, followed by the sneak.

Professor Duke was by no means a timid man, and he approached the bed boldly. A book was handy, and this he hurled at the reptile. The snake did not move. Then the professor came closer.

"Why, it's only a make-believe snake! It's made of paper!" he declared, holding it up in his fingers.

"A—a—paper snake?" faltered Stowell.

"Yes. Someone has been playing a trick on you, Stowell. The next time you are frightened you had better make an investigation before you report." And with this rather sarcastic remark Professor Duke strode from the room and down the stairs.

"A paper snake! Oh, what a sell!" Stowell murmured. "How they'll laugh at me when they hear of this!"

CHAPTER XIII

GIF'S WELCOME NEWS

After the boat races and the affair with Codfish matters at Colby Hall so far as they concerned the Rover boys and their chums moved along rapidly. The term was approaching its end, and all the cadets were anxious to make as good a showing in the examinations as possible. Through some of the younger cadets the Rovers learned what trouble Codfish had had in ridding himself of the signs that had been painted upon him. The small boys said that the sneak was terribly angry over what had occurred, but was afraid to open his mouth to any of those in authority.

"He's afraid of that licking we promised him," said Andy, and in that surmise the fun-loving youth was correct.

Of course baseball was not forgotten at Colby Hall this term. There were the usual games to be played between that institution and Hixley High, the Clearwater Country Club, Columbus

Academy and Longley. Both Randy and Andy were on the team this year as substitutes, and as it happened they had little to do. The big game this year was won by Hixley and another game was won by the Columbus boys. Colby beat the Country Club and Longley received a great drubbing, the score being 14 to 3.

"That's the time we put another one over on 'em!" cried Randy, in satisfaction. "I guess that will hold 'em for a while!"

He and his twin had managed to get into the game during the last three innings, and he had made a two-bagger while his brother had made a single which had brought in two runs.

As had been expected, there were no tears shed among those who knew him well when it was announced that Stowell was going to leave Colby Hall and had already entered for the next term at Longley Academy.

"It's a case of good riddance to bad rubbish," was Fred's comment, and to this his cousins and his chums agreed.

During those days the boys saw the girls from Clearwater Hall twice. The girls' school was to close a week before Colby Hall shut down, and this would send Mary and Martha home before their brothers and cousins.

"We're going up to Valley Brook Farm first

and take Ruth with us," said Martha. "After that I don't know exactly what we're to do. What are you going to do, Jack?"

"Gif says he has a secret," answered the young major. "He's holding it back just as Spouter held his secret back last term."

"Then you're to be Gif's guests?"

"I don't know what it is, Martha. After that accident to Mr. Garrison he and Gif cooked up something between them, but Gif won't open his mouth about it yet. He says it's to be a surprise."

"Well, surprises are very nice sometimes," put in Ruth, who was present.

"How is your dad, Ruth?"

"Oh, he's quite well now," was the girl's answer. "But he's just as much worried as ever about those formulas. He has been trying very hard to get duplicates, but without success."

"It ought not to be so very hard to get formulas for making artists' material," remarked Mary.

"That's all you know about it," answered Jack. "I was reading up on that subject some time ago. It seems some of the celebrated artists made their own pigments; and they were mighty secret about it, too, so that no one else could make exactly the same things. Why, some of the great pictures are great largely on account of the paints that were used in painting them."

"In that case I certainly hope they get the formulas back," said Martha.

The time soon came for the boys and girls to separate. Jack was sorry to part from Ruth and asked her if she would not write to him when she arrived at Valley Brook Farm.

"I will if you'll promise to answer," said the girl, and this promise was speedily given.

"Gee, but I've got a hard examination in geometry for to-morrow!" remarked Fred when the boys were returning to school. "I wish it was over."

"I suppose we all wish the examinations were over, Fred," answered the young major. "I've got that examination in Latin, you know, and it's a hard one."

They met Gif at the entrance to the campus and noticed that their chum had a broad grin on his face.

"I've got news for you at last," he said. "It's all settled."

"What's settled, Gif?" the Rover boys questioned in concert.

"Where we're to spend a large part of this summer's vacation," was the reply. "I've just been waiting to hear from my dad to make sure that everything would be all right. You're all to go with me, and of course Spouter is to be along,

too. Come on down to the river and I'll tell you all about it. Here comes Spouter now."

A few minutes later the six boys were seated on a grassy bank overlooking the Rick Rack. Then Gif pulled from an inner pocket a large envelope and took from it half a dozen photographs.

"What do you think of this?" and he passed one of the pictures around.

"Pretty nice looking bungalow, I'll say," was Jack's comment. "What's this in front of it—a river?"

"No. This is what's in front of it," and Gif handed out another photograph.

"Why, it's a lake!" exclaimed Spouter. "Looks like a dandy place, too! Just look at those hills behind it, and see those immense cedar trees! Looks like a regular paradise, Gif. Where is it?"

"What do you think of this?" went on Gif, and held out a third photograph, a picture of Mr. Garrison standing with a fishing rod in one hand and a big string of fish in the other.

"Looks like a good catch, all right," was Andy's comment. "I'd like to do as well myself."

"Was that taken up on that lake?" questioned Fred.

"It was, Fred. And here's another picture that

was taken by my dad one day along the edge of the lake."

"A bear! A big bear!" was the cry from several of the cadets.

"Is he wild?" questioned Randy quickly.

"Wild? Of course he's wild! My dad snapped the picture, but by the time he could think of a gun the bear was half a mile away. But that's nothing. My dad says there used to be a whole lot of bears around that lake. That, of course, was before the hunters got busy and killed most of them off."

"What place is this, Gif?" demanded Andy impatiently.

"This is a place we are to go to this summer, provided you fellows are agreeable. This bungalow belongs to my father. It's a big affair, and used to be used by a hunting and fishing club of which he was president. The club went to pieces and he paid a lot of their debts and took the clubhouse in payment. He thought of going up there this summer, but then changed his mind and put it up to me as to whether I thought we would like to go. There were certain details to be arranged first, so I didn't say anything until everything was settled. Now if you fellows want to go up, say the word and we'll go."

"But what place is it?" queried Spouter.

"It's Big Bear Lake."

"Oh! I've heard of that place!" cried Jack. "And I've heard all about the bears that used to live along the shores of the lake. They say it's a dandy place for hunting and fishing."

"Not much hunting in the summer time," answered Gif. "But the fishing is there, and we could have a dandy time knocking around the bungalow, and in swimming, and like that."

"If you're putting it up to me, Gif, I say let's go," cried Andy quickly.

"Go! Of course we'll go!" exclaimed his twin.

"You couldn't hold us back," burst out Fred.

"I'd just as lief go to-day and let that Latin examination slide," commented Jack, and at this there was a general laugh.

"The best news I've heard in a long time," said Spouter. "Just think of an outing in the shade of the primeval forest, close to the shore of a placid lake, where we can sit and meditate and watch the sun going down over the distant hills, and where we can hear the hoot of the lonely owl as it flits around seeking its mate, and where—"

"The ants get into the sugar, the flies into the butter, and where you always wake up if you happen to walk into a hornet's nest or a den of snakes," finished Andy.

"Who said anything about ants or hornets, or snakes either?" snorted Spouter. "You never do give me a chance to say something worth while."

"Never mind, Spouter, you'll have your chance later on," said Randy. "Some day when you are all alone in camp, and we have gone on a clambake or to hunt bears, you can stand on a rock in the middle of the lake and orate to your heart's content."

"That's the stuff, Spouter! Just think of standing on a floating rock delivering an address," chuckled Randy. "Wouldn't that be original?"

"I'll address you if you don't look out," answered Spouter, and threw a handful of dirt at his tormentor.

After that the boys plied Gif with questions in regard to the bungalow at Big Bear Lake and as to where the place was located.

"All I can tell you is that we'll take the train to Boston and then another train to a place called Rocky Run. That's a small place at the upper end of the lake. There we'll take our boats—my father owns three of them—and row down the lake until we reach the bungalow. The lake, you know, is several miles long and between a quarter and a half a mile wide and has a number of islands in it. One of the islands used to have a fishing

club colony on it, but the whole place burned down several years ago."

"Any other places on the lake besides Rocky Run?"

"Yes. There is the town of Beldane at the lower end. There are also a number of bungalows at the upper end of the lake and one or two bungalows on the opposite shore. But taking it generally, the place is rather a wild one."

"That suits me," said Fred. "The wilder the better."

"I wonder if we'll get a chance at one of those bears," mused Jack.

"We'd better take some guns along," said Fred.

"Oh, yes, we'll have to do that!" answered Gif. "My father said he would send us a list of just what things we ought to take along and what supplies we ought to get when we reach Rocky Run. There is an old storekeeper up there named Mumbleton, Mose Mumbleton. He has done many favors for my father and for the members of the fishing club generally, and my father said he would rather have us buy our supplies there than ship them from Beldane or Boston. It would give Mumbleton a chance to make a little money, and we might find his friendship worth something to us while we were up there."

After that the boys looked over the photographs

again and continued to talk about Big Bear Lake and the good times they expected to have there until the bell rang for the evening parade.

Although it was still early in June the night proved an unusually warm one, and after having prepared himself for the examination in Latin on the next day Jack found it almost impossible to get to sleep. He tumbled and tossed on the bed for the best part of an hour and finally arose, to sit by the open window for a while.

He had been resting there for perhaps five minutes gazing out dreamily into the moonlight, when he heard the put-put of a motor-boat on the river. Then somewhat to his surprise he saw a motor-boat turn in to the Colby Hall dock. Several figures sprang ashore and hurried into the boat-house belonging to the military academy.

"Hello! what does that mean? That can't be one of our motor-boats," murmured the young major to himself. "That looks mighty queer to me."

He hesitated for a moment and then aroused his cousins.

"Seems to me we ought to look into this," said Fred. "Those fellows may be nothing but thieves."

"If some of our fellows have been out on a lark we don't want to get them into trouble," said

Andy. "I move we sneak downstairs and make an investigation."

The others agreed to this, and all quickly donned their shoes and clothing and then made for the fire-escape, which they so often used in preference to the regular stairway.

As they ran across the campus they saw three figures steal forth from the Colby Hall boathouse. The three figures made for the motor-boat at the dock, and in a minute more the Rovers heard the motor of the boat and then saw the craft glide out into the semi-darkness of the night.

"Now what were they doing at the boathouse?" questioned Jack.

Struck with a sudden fear, the young major broke into a run, followed by the others. They dashed into the boathouse, which was dark, and in one corner saw a faint glare.

"It's a fire!" gasped Fred. "Somebody has set the place on fire!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE ROVERS AT HOME

THE young captain of the Colby Hall cadets was right. A small fire was blazing fiercely in one corner of the boathouse but a few feet away from where two of the racing shells were stored.

"Sound the alarm, Randy!" cried Jack. "And you, Andy, run for a pail of water. Fred and I will get the fire extinguishers."

The young cadets had had more than one fire drill and knew exactly how to go to work to get the best of the incipient conflagration. While Randy ran off toward Colonel Colby's cottage to give the alarm, Andy grabbed up two fire buckets which were already filled and hurried with them toward the blaze. In the meanwhile Jack ran to the far end of the boathouse, where was located a fire extinguisher, while Fred sped off to the gymnasium to get another.

When Andy arrived with his water he found the blaze mounting up one side of the boathouse. He dashed the water as high as possible, realizing that the fire would spread rapidly if it reached

the loft overhead, which was stored with all sorts of combustible material. Then the youth ran out to refill the buckets at the side of the dock.

By the time Jack managed to arrive with the fire extinguisher the blaze was covering one whole end of the boathouse. He got the extinguisher into action as speedily as possible, squirting the fire destroying compound where he thought it would do the most good. As Fred appeared with another extinguisher the bell outside began to ring and half a dozen men came running toward the boathouse, most of them in their bathrobes and slippers.

"How did this happen, Major Rover?" demanded Captain Dale in a somewhat harsh voice.

"I'll tell you after the fire is out, Captain," answered the young major of the school battalion. "We've got to work quickly here if we're going to put this out."

"Form a bucket brigade," ordered Captain Dale, addressing the others who were arriving. And while this was being done he caught the fire extinguisher from Fred's hands and began to spray the contents as high up as he could reach on the boathouse wall.

Inside of three minutes the whole school was aroused and the cadets came tumbling out on the campus in all sorts of dress and undress. As

they came out they were stopped by Fred and Captain Glasby of Company A, who quickly formed them into a fire brigade and sent them for the fire buckets and fire ladders.

"Gee, that's going to be some blaze!"

"I hope the boathouse doesn't burn down and all our boats with it!"

"Why can't we get the boats out?"

"We can! Come on, fellows, quick!" And thereupon part of the crowd rushed into the boathouse to save whatever could be handled.

In the meanwhile a hose had been attached to a new water tower near the gymnasium, and soon a stream from this was directed upon the flames. For fully ten minutes it seemed to be a toss-up as to whether the boathouse would be consumed or not. But the professors and the cadets worked vigorously, and presently it was seen that the flames were going down.

"Hurrah, boys, we've got the best of it!" shouted Jack encouragingly. "Keep it up! Pass that water along lively!" And the buckets came along the line so rapidly that it was all three cadets and two professors at the front could do to empty them.

At last the spot where the fire had originated was only a smoking and steaming mass. With the conflagration out it was quite dark in and

around the boathouse and lights had to be lit so the workers could see what they were doing.

"I guess it's out," said Colonel Colby at last, and gave a sigh of relief.

"I'll place Nixon and Crews on guard with a number of pails of water," said Captain Dale. "They can remain here for the rest of the night just as well as not."

"Has any one any idea how this fire started?" demanded the owner of the school, looking around at the assembled professors and cadets.

"I have," answered Jack. "I'm quite sure the place was set on fire."

"You surprise me, Major Rover," answered Colonel Colby. "What have you to tell?"

In a few words Jack related his story and then the other Rovers told of what they knew concerning the affair. As the recital proceeded Colonel Colby's brow grew dark.

"You say there were three persons in that motor-boat?" he questioned.

"So far as I could see," answered Jack. "Of course the moonlight isn't very strong to-night."

"I saw the three fellows as they rushed back to the motor-boat after they came from the boathouse," put in Randy.

"So did I," added his twin, and Fred said the same.

"Did any of you recognize any of those persons?"

At this the Rover boys shook their heads.

"Did you recognize the motor-boat?" put in Captain Dale.

At this Jack grew thoughtful and looked at Fred.

"I don't like to say as to that," answered the major of the school battalion slowly. "I might be mistaken and get the wrong people into trouble."

"But you think you know something?" put in Colonel Colby quickly.

"I didn't recognize the motor-boat so far as looks go," answered Jack. "It was the peculiar put-put the engine made when the boat came in and when it went away. You know, motor-boats are apt to have a peculiar sound of their own."

"What did this motor-boat sound like, Rover? If you have any definite idea I think you ought to let me know."

"I don't want to hide anything, Colonel Colby. In fact, I'm almost as anxious to find out who set this fire as you are," went on Jack, with a little smile. "But I'd hate to accuse anybody wrongly. If, however, you insist upon knowing what is in my mind, I'll say that the put-put of that engine sounded to me like the put-put of one of the Longley Academy boats."

"Longley Academy!" exclaimed Colonel Colby and Captain Dale simultaneously.

"Are you sure of this?" demanded the captain.

"No, I'm not. That's the reason I didn't want to say anything about it."

"Why should any one from Longley come over here and want to burn down our boathouse?" demanded the colonel.

"Maybe they're sore because they lost those races," put in Andy.

"I don't believe they'd be mean enough to go as far as that," said the owner of the institution. "However, I'll start an investigation the first thing in the morning."

The cadets went back to their quarters and soon the Rover boys were once more preparing to retire.

"I wonder if Flanders, Halliday and Sands would be wicked enough to come over here and start a fire?" questioned Fred.

"I'd hate to accuse anybody of doing that," answered Randy.

"Perhaps it was some rascals who have a grudge against Colonel Colby," suggested Jack.

"Who could have such a grudge as that?" demanded Fred. "He treats all his hired help fine. I don't know of a single person around Colby

Hall who doesn't like the colonel. And all the tradespeople in town like him too."

"I wasn't thinking of the people who work for him," answered the young major. "I was thinking of the fellows who used to be cadets here and who were fired out—fellows like Werner and Martell."

The boys talked the matter over for several minutes, but could arrive at no conclusion and finally retired. But it was some time before any of them got to sleep.

In the morning Colonel Colby, aided by Captain Dale, started his investigation into the origin of the fire. A hunt was made up and down the lake for the mysterious motor-boat, and Captain Dale even paid a visit to Longley Academy. There he was received with decided coldness.

"None of our boats were out last night. I am sure of that," said the head of the newly organized military academy. "To think that any of our cadets would be guilty of setting fire to your boathouse is ridiculous, Captain Dale."

"I did not say that they were guilty," answered the captain briefly. "We are simply trying to get at the bottom of this affair. I am sure if one of your buildings were burned you would like to find out who did it."

"I think this is simply a move on Colonel Colby's part to bring Longley Academy into disrepute," said the master of the institution frigidly. "It is an outrageous proceeding! I warn you not to make this matter public. If you do, you may find yourselves confronting a suit for damages."

"I am not saying anything in public," returned Captain Dale, and a few minutes later took his departure.

Of course the cadets talked the matter over freely among themselves. A few thought that some of their athletic rivals might have committed the crime, but the majority were of the opinion that it must have been done by outsiders, and possibly by those who in years gone by had been dismissed from the Hall. The actual damage did not amount to more than two hundred dollars, and Colonel Colby said he would have the boathouse repaired just as soon as the present school term came to an end.

At last, much to the cadets' satisfaction, the examinations were at an end. All of the Rovers and their friends had acquitted themselves creditably, passing with from ninety-two to ninety-six per cent. Of the three cadets at the Hall who did not pass, one was Henry Stowell. But to this that sneak gave little consideration.

"Why should I break my head to pass when

I'm going to leave Colby Hall for good in a couple of days?" said Codfish to the few who would listen to him. "No more of this institution for me! I'm going to a first-class place this fall," and he stuck his nose up in the air.

"We'll miss you, Codfish," remarked Andy, who chanced to hear these words. "We'll miss you just like a fellow misses the toothache or a corn on his toe."

"Huh! Don't you talk to me, Andy Rover," grumbled Codfish. "I know you!" and then he hurried away without anything more to say.

It had been decided that the Rovers should return home for over the Fourth of July, and then they were to meet Gif and Spouter in Boston for the journey to Big Bear Lake.

"Good-by to Colby Hall!" cried Randy, when the term had at last come to an end. "Hurrah for Big Bear Lake!"

"And hurrah for all the bears we're going to shoot!" put in his twin.

"And the fish we're going to catch!" added Fred.

"And the jolly times generally we're going to have!" finished Jack.

The journey to New York City did not take long, and at the Grand Central Terminal the boys, as usual, found their mothers awaiting them with

the family automobiles. There was a good deal of hugging and kissing, and then all drove up Fifth Avenue and over to the elegant homes on Riverside Drive.

"Gee, it's fine to be home again, Mother!" cried Fred.

"Yes, Fred. Only you don't like to stay in it after you get here," replied his parent fondly.

"Oh, well, you know a boy has got to be a boy," he answered.

That evening there was a grand family party between the boys and their parents, the girls having already departed for Valley Brook Farm with Ruth and May. Dick, Tom and Sam Rover wanted to know all about how the boys had been getting along at the school, and then told a little of how business matters were going with them.

"The oil wells in Texas and Oklahoma are doing wonderfully well," said Dick Rover in reply to a question from his son. "It was the best work I ever did to go down into those oil fields."

"How about matters in Wall Street?" questioned Randy.

"Couldn't be better, Randy," responded Tom Rover. "Everything seems to be coming our way now."

"Any more trouble with the Martell crowd?"

"No. Since we got rid of Martell and Brown

everything has been going along swimmingly," replied Tom Rover.

"What are you folks going to do this summer?" questioned Andy. "Why can't you come and visit us while we're at Big Bear Lake?"

"Perhaps we shall," answered his Uncle Sam.

"Oh, Dad! that would be fine," burst out Fred. "Come up, by all means!"

"Well, we'll see about that," answered his father. "Your mother and your aunts want to go up to Valley Brook Farm first and stay with the girls."

"Oh, bring the whole bunch up to Big Bear Lake!" cried Jack. It must be confessed though that when he spoke he was thinking mainly of Ruth. "Gif says it's a great big bungalow—in fact, a small-sized hotel."

"It used to be used for a fishing club, you know," came from Andy. "It would be great if we could all be up there together just like when we were out at Big Horn Ranch."

"Well, that's something we'll have to think over," said Dick Rover.

CHAPTER XV

ON THE WAY TO BIG BEAR LAKE

"Off at last for Big Bear Lake!"

"This is the life, boys! We ought to have a dandy time!"

"Right you are, Fred! Oh, my, what fishing!"

"Yes, and what boating and bathing, Andy!"

"I wonder if Gif and Spouter will be on hand to meet us?"

"They said so in that telegram I got last night," answered Jack.

"Sure, they'll be on hand," broke in Randy. "They never disappointed us yet."

The four Rover boys were seated in a Pullman car that was whisking them rapidly toward Boston. Each had a suitcase with him and numerous other things to be taken to the camp.

Fourth of July had come and gone with its usual festivities. In his grip Andy carried an imitation giant firecracker filled with nothing more dangerous than collars, neckties and handkerchiefs. With this giant firecracker he had scared

several of the servants half to death, thinking he was going to blow up the kitchen of the house in which he lived.

It was an ideal summer day and the boys sat by the windows enjoying the scenery as it rushed past them. All were in the best of humor.

"This isn't like going out to Big Horn Ranch," said Fred, a bit wistfully. "I'm afraid we'll miss the cattle and the cowboys and all that."

"I'd like to get a crack at a bear," came from Fred. "Gee, wouldn't it be a feather in our cap to bring down a big fellow!"

"How about it if the bear came along and brought you down by hugging you to death?" questioned Jack dryly.

"Pooh! who's afraid of bears?" answered the stout young Rover.

The boys had left New York after an early breakfast and one o'clock found them at the South Station of the Hub. As they came forth from the smoky train shed, suitcases and bundles in hand, Gif and Spouter rushed forward to meet them.

"Well, I see you've got here safe and sound!" cried Gif.

"Now we can catch the two o'clock train for Rocky Run," put in Spouter. "Come ahead. We can get a couple of taxicabs right outside."

"I thought maybe you'd want to stay in Boston all night and start for Rocky Run in the morning," remarked Randy, who had not visited the Hub many times and who would have liked to look around the city.

"Oh, come ahead! We want to get to Rocky Run as soon as we can!" cried Spouter. "Don't you say so too, Jack?"

"It's up to Gif," answered Jack. "We're his guests, you know."

"Oh, stow that, Jack," answered Gif quickly. "We're going up to Big Bear Lake on an equal footing. Nobody is to be boss. This is a free-for-all," and he gave a happy little laugh.

Having piled into two taxicabs, it did not take Gif and his guests long to reach the North Station. Here they procured tickets for Rocky Run and then found they had still half an hour to wait for a train.

"Let's get some books and magazines to take along and maybe a game or two," suggested Fred. "We may want something to read or to play if we strike bad weather. You know how dull a week of rain can be in camp."

The boys procured a number of newspapers and magazines and some packages of candy, and in a little while the train for Rocky Run rolled

into the station. All this while Gif was looking around anxiously.

"What's up, Gif? Are you expecting somebody?" questioned Jack.

"I am. But it looks as if he wasn't coming," answered Gif. "It's just like him. He's the slowest fellow I know. But dad said we might as well take him along. There's nothing much for him to do at home just now."

"Who are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about Jeff, our hired man. Dad said we might as well take him up to the bungalow to do the cooking and some of the other work."

"Gee! a colored man, eh?" exclaimed Andy. "We're to go up there in style!"

"I'd rather not have him along," answered Gif. "But dad said we might as well take him and make him earn his salary. You see the folks are not at home a great deal, and that doesn't leave Jeff much to do."

As Gif was speaking a tall, ungainly-looking colored man, wearing a pepper and salt suit and a light derby hat, shuffled into view, carrying a valise in one hand and a bundle done up in a newspaper in the other. As he came closer he began to smile languidly.

"I'd an awful walk reachin' here, Mistah Gif,"

he remarked, as he let his big car bump into "Jewish walk." I got all tangled up in those words about streets. Never did see streets like those here ones in Boston."

"I thought you wouldn't get here, Jeff," answered Gil. "Get aboard. The car is about to start. Boys, this is Jefferson Adams Lincoln Wilson always called Jeff for short. Jeff, this is Sir Spunky and those are the Mr. Bumps, number one, two, three and four."

"Yes, sir! Yes, sir!" responded the funny colored man bowing gracefully all around. "Yes, sir! One, two, three, four! That's them, yes, sir," and then he followed the boys as they boarded the train.

"How far is it to Rocky Run?" questioned Fred, after the grand hall scene had taken place, Jeff just behind them.

"It will take us about four hours to get there on this train," answered Gil. "We run as far as Hummingpond on the main line and then switch off to Rocky Run."

"In that case we won't reach Rocky Run until about dark," answered Jack. "Do you think we can get to the bungalow tonight?"

"Dad said if we couldn't we were to ask old Mose Thornberry. If he couldn't put us up all right. He said he was almost certain Mose could

accommodate us, for he often accommodates fishing parties."

"Then that's all right. We wouldn't want to get lost on the lake in the darkness," put in Randy.

"Why not? It would be a barrel of fun," added his twin carelessly.

"Has Jeff ever been up there?" asked Fred in a low tone.

"Oh, yes. He's been up there several times. That's one reason dad wanted us to have him along. He said Jeff could show us where the best fishing places were and all that sort of thing. Besides, Jeff has quite a reputation when it comes to serving fish. That's his specialty."

"Well, we've got to catch the fish before we have 'em served," remarked Jack dryly.

"There's only one trouble with Jeff. He's very lazy, and apt to go to sleep if you give him half a chance. Otherwise, he isn't a half bad sort."

The Rover boys and Spouter soon had evidence of Jeff's failing, for the train had been traveling for less than half an hour when, on glancing back, the boys saw that Jeff was leaning back in the seat with eyes closed, evidently sleeping soundly.

"I'll bet he isn't of a worrying disposition," was Fred's comment.

"I don't believe he ever worried about anything," answered Gif.

"I think I'll give him a little bit to worry about," murmured Andy, tearing a long slip of transparent paper from one of the candy packages the boys had purchased. Taking the slip, Andy rolled it into a long taper with a pointed end. Then he walked down the aisle and took a place in a vacant seat directly behind the sleeping colored man. Reaching over, he began to tickle Jeff in his ear. The colored man paid no attention for a few seconds. But then, very slowly, his hand came up and he brushed his ear. This operation was repeated several times, and caused all of the boys to snicker. Then Andy reached over and tickled Jeff in the nose.

Ker choo! Ker choo! Jeff suddenly awoke with a start and began to sneeze vigorously. As he did this, Andy dropped out of sight while the others pretended to be busy with their papers and magazines.

"My, my! I must be ketchin' cold," murmured the colored man. "I guess I'd better close that window," and he suited the action to the word by bringing the window down with a bang. Then he settled himself for another nap.

Again the end of the pointed taper came in con-

tact with his ear, and again Jeff slapped not once but several times at an imaginary fly. Then once more Andy applied the pointed paper to his nose.

This time the sneezing that followed brought more results than had been expected. Poor Jeff bobbed up suddenly, and then his head came down violently in contact with the seat in front of him.

"My land sakes!" he wailed. "What am the mattah with my nose?" and then he sneezed again.

"You sure are catching a cold, Jeff. Better take another seat where there's less draft," suggested Gif.

"I knowed yeste'day I was ketchin' cold," answered the colored man slowly. "I was in the kitchen at your house workin' and they had the window open. I was sure I was goin' to ketch cold. I can't stand no draft nohow," and he shuffled away to another seat in the extreme corner of the car.

"Some fun, Andy, I'll say," remarked Randy, with glistening eyes, as his twin rejoined him. "I think Jeff is going to give us many a pleasant time while we're up at Big Bear Lake."

"I'll say so," was the quick reply.

"You take care that Jeff doesn't discover what you're up to," admonished Jack. "He may not like it a bit."

"Oh, Jeff is too lazy to notice most things," answered Gif. "Just the same, I wouldn't stir him up too much," he added, after a moment's reflection.

Quickly the afternoon wore away, and a little after six o'clock the boys arrived at the little station of Rocky Run. Here they alighted, followed by Jeff, who had all he could do to carry his own baggage and did not attempt to assist any of the others.

The lads found that Rocky Run consisted of nothing more than half a dozen houses, a general store and post-office, the railroad station, and half a dozen boathouses. Over the store was the sign:

MOSES MUMBLETON
General Merchandise
Laundry Agency
Rocky Run Post-Office
Justice of the Peace
Notary Public
Boats to Hire
Orders taken for Cord Wood

"Looks as if Mose did a little bit of everything," was Jack's comment, with a grin.

"He's about the whole shooting match up here, I guess," answered Gif. "Come on! Let's leave

our baggage here in a heap and go over to the store."

With Gif and Jack in advance, the six boys left the railroad station and walked across a broad roadway to where the general store was located. This was in a long and broad two-story wooden building with a one-story addition in the rear. In front was a piazza with two steps, a broad double door, and two show windows filled with various goods which had evidently been there on exhibition for some time.

As the boys entered the establishment it was so dark inside they could for the moment make out but little. Then they saw an elderly man with a heavy gray beard leaning on a broad counter in the rear talking earnestly to two young fellows who were evidently customers.

"Well, that's the price," the man behind the counter was saying. "I can't sell those goods for any less."

"It's a fierce price, I'll say," remarked one of the would-be customers.

"We could get those things much cheaper in the city," put in the other youth standing at the counter.

At the sound of the two voices Jack clutched Gif by the arm.

"What do you know about this, Gif!" he

gasped. "Am I dreaming, or is that really Tommy Flanders?"

"It's Flanders all right enough," answered Gif. "And Paul Halliday is with him. Now what in the world brought those two fellows up here?"

CHAPTER XVI

ON BIG BEAR LAKE

As THE Colby Hall cadets came closer, Tommy Flanders and Paul Halliday looked around at them.

"Hello! what do you know about this?" cried Flanders.

"What brought you fellows up here?" put in Halliday.

"Haven't we a right to be here if we want to?" questioned Jack coolly. He did not like the tone of voice in which the boys from Longley Academy had addressed them.

"Oh, I suppose you have a right to come to Big Bear Lake," answered Tommy Flanders. "Just the same, I don't give you any credit for following us."

"As a matter of fact, we're not following you," retorted Gif. "We didn't even know you were here. Have you come to stay?"

"Have we come to stay!" burst out Halliday. "That's a good one! You know well enough we came to stay."

"You can't pull the wool over our eyes," growled Flanders. "If you have come up to Big Bear Lake for a vacation, you simply came to follow us."

By this time the others had come into the general store, adding to the surprise of the cadets from Longley, who glared at them darkly.

"If it isn't Tommy Flanders and Paul Halliday!" burst out Randy. "What do you know about this!"

"They must be staying up here," returned Spouter. "Otherwise it isn't likely that they would be at the store."

"Where are you fellows stopping?" questioned Halliday, as he approached Fred.

"We're not stopping anywhere just yet. We just got off the train," answered Fred.

"But you're going to stay at the lake, aren't you?"

"Yes, if you want to know."

"On the east shore?"

"No; on the west shore."

"Huh! you didn't dare to come over to where we are located, did you?" sneered Halliday.

"Then you're located over on the east shore, are you?" questioned Gif.

"Of course we are. At the old Willoughby camp. You know that as well as I do. Why,

half the cadets at Colby Hall knew our bunch was coming up here."

"Your bunch?" demanded Jack, with interest. "How many of you?"

"Ten so far; and three or four others are coming later."

"Henry Stowell is coming to-morrow to join us," remarked Halliday. "He's quitting Colby, you know, and coming to Longley this fall."

"Well, you're welcome to Codfish," announced Randy quickly.

"Oh, he's all right if only you didn't tease him too much," answered the youth who had at one time been Randy's fellow cadet.

In the midst of the talk two other boys arrived, Billy Sands and a youth named Ted Maxwell, who was a captain at Longley. Maxwell was a tall, quiet fellow and quite gentlemanly in contrast to his schoolmates.

"Yes, about a dozen or fifteen of us are to spend the summer at the lake," said Maxwell to Jack, as he shook hands. "Ten of us came up three days ago, and the others are coming the beginning of next week. We have hired the old Willoughby place, which, as perhaps you know, has two little bungalows on it and a little boat-house. We hope to have a dandy time."

"We won't have such a good time if we know

these fellows are going to be up here," growled Halliday.

"Oh, I don't know," answered Ted Maxwell cheerfully. "We might get up some rowing and swimming contests and things like that."

"I didn't come up here to go into any contests," broke in Tommy Flanders. "I came up to take it easy and have a good time."

"That's me, too," put in Billy Sands. "I'm just going to take it easy every day."

"Well, a little exercise won't hurt anybody," answered Maxwell. "I don't want to go stale, and neither do you fellows, if any of you expect to make the football team this fall."

Maxwell asked the Colby cadets where they were going to locate, and Gif and the others told him about the old fishing club bungalow and of their plans for a grand outing.

"That fishing club outfit is directly across the lake from our camp," said Maxwell. "We were rowing over that way only yesterday."

"I hope the camp is in good condition," said Gif anxiously, wondering if Flanders and his cronies had visited the place and possibly done some harm.

"It seemed to be. We didn't land."

A few words more followed and then the crowd from Longley departed, after purchasing a few

things from Mr. Mumbleton. They moved down past the railroad station to the lake and there set off in two rowboats for their camp.

"This is a fine state of affairs," grumbled Gif. "I don't know whether we'll have a good time or not with those fellows around."

"Oh, well, they'll be on the other side of the lake," answered Fred. "How much of a distance between the two places?"

"The lake is about half a mile wide where our camp is located, and midway between the two places there are a number of small islands which my father used to call the Cat and Kittens."

Mose Mumbleton had listened with interest to what all the boys had had to say. Now he shook hands cordially with Gif, who speedily introduced the others. In the meantime Jeff had calmly proceeded to make himself at home on the piazza of the general store, nodding peacefully as he sat with his back against one of the posts.

"I thought you might know that Flanders boy," said the old storekeeper. "He goes to a military academy, too."

"Yes, we know the whole bunch; but we didn't know they were coming up here."

"The folks around here don't like Mr. Flanders any too well," continued the storekeeper. "You see, Flanders bought the old Micwic factory on

Flat Rock Creek, and they say he is going to put it in operation again. The bungalow colony is up in arms against such a move. They don't want any factory around here, nor do they want any factory hands locating along the lake."

"Where is that factory located?" questioned Fred.

"It's just below where those boys have their camp—about halfway between the camp and this place," answered the storekeeper.

"See here," said Gif, motioning Jack and Spouter to one side. "Now that we know that crowd is across the lake from our bungalow, don't you think it would be better if we went up to the camp without further delay? I want to be certain that they haven't visited the place and upset things. I wouldn't put it past them to do it. We can come down here to-morrow and get our supplies. Of course, we could take up a few things now, just enough for breakfast and maybe lunch."

"That suits me," answered Jack.

"Yes, let's get to the camp, by all means. I want to see what kind of place it is," answered Spouter.

As a consequence of this, Gif asked the old storekeeper about their boats.

"I got 'em all ready for you just as soon

as I received your letter," said Mr. Mumbleton. "They're locked up in my boathouse, and I can get 'em out in a few minutes."

"Then let us have a few groceries and things like that and we'll be off," returned Gif. "We'll come back to-morrow for our regular supplies. We have a list all made out, and I'll leave it with you."

"Suits me."

Thereupon the boys obtained some bread, coffee, sugar, condensed milk, eggs, bacon and a few other things which were placed in a couple of empty boxes. Then all went back to the railroad station for their baggage.

"Here's a sample of what we can expect from those other fellows," growled Andy, as he pointed to the railroad platform. On their baggage had been piled some dirty brushwood and leaves.

"Well, let's be thankful they didn't do anything worse," was Randy's comment. "They might have hidden the stuff from us, or something like that."

"I guess they didn't dare!" burst out Jack. "They knew we'd be after them in a jiffy if they did anything like that."

Brushing off the baggage, the boys, followed by Jeff, made their way to Mose Mumbleton's boathouse. The old storekeeper was already on hand

and had brought forth three rowboats with six pairs of oars.

"I went over each one of the boats carefully," said the storekeeper. "You'll find 'em in apple-pie condition."

"All right. And don't forget that we'll be back to-morrow for our regular supplies," answered Gif. "Come on, fellows. It's getting late and it'll be dark before we reach camp."

Gif was right about the darkness, because the sun was already sinking behind the forest to the westward, casting long shadows across the bosom of Big Bear Lake.

"Wonder if we'll see any bears on our way up," came from Andy, as he took his seat in one of the boats.

"Sure! we'll see a dozen of them," returned his twin, with a grin. "They'll all be lined up on the shore bidding us welcome."

"Don't forget, Jeff, you're to row one of the boats," cried Gif gayly.

"Does you want me to row that boat all alone?" questioned the colored man doubtfully.

"Why, of course! You're to row the boat and you are to pull the other two boats, too."

"What! Me pull the boat all alone and tow the two other boats too?" questioned Jeff, in con-

sternation. "I can't do it, nohow! No man could!"

"Oh, Gif is only fooling, Jeff," put in Spouter. "We can do the rowing just as well as not. We'll let you cook supper for us when we land."

There had been little wind during the day, but now it seemed to spring up, sighing drearily through the trees lining the shore. Then the sun suddenly sank behind a heavy bank of clouds.

"Doesn't look as if we'd have any moonlight to-night," remarked Andy.

"Seems to me we're going to have quite a blow," answered Fred, as he glanced through the tree-tops at the clouds.

"Come on, fellows! Everybody on the job!" cried Gif.

He and Fred, along with Jeff, were in the first boat to get off. Quickly Andy and Jack followed, and then came Randy and Spouter.

The course lay along the lakeshore and then past a broad cove where there was a string of small islands. As they passed the last of these islands they found the wind increasing and suddenly saw some whitecaps ahead.

"We're in for a regular blow!" cried Gif.

"How far have we still to row?" called out Randy.

"About a mile."

"Oh, that isn't so bad."

"We've got to go slow around here," called back Gif. "The lake is shallow and there are a great number of snags. Don't hit any of them and upset."

As the boys continued to row the wind increased in violence, and soon whitecaps surrounded them.

"Maybe we'd bettah pull in closer to shore," suggested Jeff, as one of the whitecaps came over the side of the rowboat, covering them with spray.

"Oh, we'll head straight for the bungalow," answered Gif. "Come on, Fred, bend to it!" and they began to row with a will and the others followed.

A quarter of a mile more was covered when the wind seemed suddenly to descend on the three boats with added violence.

"Gee! we can't make any headway against this," gasped Fred.

"Hadn't we better turn toward shore?" called out Andy, from the second boat, which was close behind.

"Perhaps we'd better," was the answer. "I don't believe this blow will last any great length of time."

The third boat had dropped a little behind and

was almost lost to view in the fast-gathering darkness.

"They're turning to shore," said Spouter to Randy. "We might as well do the same thing."

To turn the craft in that heavy wind was not easy. A wave came dashing over the side, wetting them from the knees down. Then the boat whirled around and all at once slid up on a snag.

"Look out! We're going over!" cried Spouter, and the next instant the rowboat upset and he and Randy were floundering in the lake.

CHAPTER XVII

TO THE RESCUE

"HELP! Help!" The cry came from Spouter, who was floundering around in the semi-darkness of the fast-increasing storm. He had been pitched overboard so suddenly that he had had no time in which to protect himself. Consequently he had scraped his arm on the fallen tree which had caused the overturning of the rowboat.

"What's that cry?" came from Gif.

"Somebody calling for help," answered Andy. "Look! One of our boats has upset!"

"It's the boat that had Spouter and Randy in it," came from Jack.

"They must have struck one of the snags Gif told us about," remarked Fred. "Come! We'd better turn back and see what's doing."

In spite of the violence of the wind and the whitecaps on the lake none of the others imagined that Spouter and Randy were in any great danger. In fact, they were inclined to look at the affair as a joke. They knew that both of the cadets who had gone overboard could swim well.

"Help! Help!" came again from Spouter. "Help! Quick!"

"What is it, Spouter?" called back Jack. "Are you hurt? How about Randy?"

"Randy's in trouble. He's caught on a snag! Come quick!"

"Randy in trouble?" The cry came from several of the boys, and as quickly as possible those in the first two boats turned around and made for the spot where the upsetting had taken place.

What Spouter had said about Randy was true. When the boat upset Randy had gone under and then come to the surface. He had attempted to strike out for either the boat or the shore, and had then been caught by a limb of the submerged tree. Then, because of this and because the boat was pounding against it, the submerged tree had in some way turned over, carrying the upper part of Randy's body under the surface of the lake. His feet were in the air, and he was kicking around vigorously trying to extricate himself from his perilous position.

It took those in the two remaining boats but a few seconds to reach the scene of the catastrophe. They beheld Spouter working frantically, trying to pull Randy to the surface.

"What is it?" came from Jack.

"He's caught! I can't bring him up!" gasped Spouter. "He's caught on a tree limb, I guess."

"Shove that boat back!" ordered Gif, and then reached out with his oar to hold the craft in check, for the upturned boat was being driven by the wind directly over the spot where Randy and Spouter were struggling.

It was certainly a critical moment, and no one understood it better than did Jack. The tree had bobbed around, and for a few seconds Randy's head had come to the surface, giving him a chance for fresh air. Then the tree had settled once more and poor Randy's head had disappeared as before. Jack hesitated only an instant, and then sprang into the lake beside Spouter.

"What is it, Spouter? Can you make out?" he questioned quickly. "Is his arm or part of his body caught, or is it only his clothing?"

"It's his arm. It's twisted around one of the tree limbs," gasped the other.

Taking a deep breath, Jack allowed himself to sink down. He felt around in the darkness under water and found Randy's free arm. The boy was doing his best to liberate the other arm, which was held tightly in a crotch of the submerged tree. Close beside the limb was a sharp rock, and the force of the overturning tree was holding Randy against this.

"I've got to get him out somehow," thought the young major, and, pressing himself against the rock, he pushed with all his might on the tree limb, trying to force it back. Then he gave his cousin's body a shove. Then, unable to hold his breath longer, he came to the surface.

As Jack did this the body of Randy appeared two yards away. He was all but overcome when Spouter went to the rescue, followed by Fred. Between them they managed to hoist the gasping youth into one of the boats. Then they got into another craft, and Jack did likewise.

By this time the wind was blowing more furiously than ever and the cadets found it all they could do to get to shore. Fortunately they found a small inlet where, among the bushes, it was comparatively quiet. In the meanwhile the upturned boat drifted away and was lost to sight in the darkness.

"Is Randy all right?" questioned Gif anxiously, flashing a searchlight he carried.

"He's pretty well used up," returned Fred. "But I think he'll come around."

An instant later Randy gave a deep gasp and then opened his eyes. Then he commenced to cough and presently sat up.

By this time it had begun to rain and the boys could see that they were in for a sudden summer

storm. At first the rain came down gently, but soon there was a heavy downpour and all were glad to seek the shelter of some overhanging trees.

In the meanwhile several of the boys did what they could for poor Randy. He felt rather weak from his thrilling experience, and had little to say. But they knew he would get over it, and for this they were exceedingly thankful.

"Gee! if he'd been drowned I don't know what we should have done," Jack said, with a shudder.

"Please don't mention it, Jack!" returned Andy. "If anything like that had happened to Randy I'd never have been able to go home and face mother and father."

"It shows how careful we've got to be when we're out on this lake," came from Fred. "Gif warned us about those snags."

"This is the only part of the lake where those snags exist," said Gif. "The rest of the lake is perfectly clear and deep enough for any ordinary boat. Father used to warn us against coming up along this shore. He always said it was much safer to go outside, even if one rowed around some of those islands."

"And I'll say your father was right!" returned Spouter. "I think if we'd taken the outside route we'd have been perfectly safe even in the wind."

"If you young gen'lemen wants to walk to the bungalow there's a path through the woods jest behind here," announced Jeff presently. The accident had scared him very much. "Of course it would be a wet walk, but you could make it. It ain't more'n a mile at the most."

"Well, we'll either have to do that or else stay here all night," said Gif.

"What about that lost boat?" questioned Jack.

"We can't do anything about that in the wind and the darkness, Jack. We'll have to wait until the storm is over and it grows light."

"And what about my suitcase and that one belonging to Randy? They both went overboard when the boat upset," put in Spouter mournfully.

"Maybe we can fish them up if the lake isn't too deep," suggested Fred. "But we'll want to do it in good weather and when it is light. We don't want to take any more chances with those snags."

"What about you, Randy? Do you think you can walk to the bungalow?" questioned Jack kindly.

"I can try," was the brave response. "I think I can walk part of the way, anyhow."

"We can carry you the rest of the way if we have to," answered Jack. "In fact, I can start to carry you right now," he added.

But Randy would not submit to this, and so the whole crowd started off through the woods on foot, Jeff and Gif leading the way. They carried their suitcases with them, but left the bundles behind.

By the aid of the searchlight it was comparatively easy to find the path through the woods, and once on this they found walking not so bad. Toward the end of the journey Randy lagged a little, and thereupon Jack insisted that his cousin get on his back.

When they finally reached the bungalow they found the long, low, one-story building in absolute darkness. The front door had two padlocks upon it, and Gif produced the keys given to him by his father and unlocked the portal and threw it open. Then he threw the rays of the searchlight into the living room. At once came a scurry of little feet and then several dark objects scuttled through an open doorway toward the rear of the building.

"What were they?" questioned Spouter quickly.

"I don't know. Either rats or squirrels. Anyway, they're gone," answered Gif. "Come on in out of the rain," for the wind was blowing the rain well under the wide porch of the bungalow.

By the illumination afforded by the flashlight the boys could see that the living room of the

bungalow was plainly but neatly furnished with a big square table, several chairs and two long benches. To one side was a large fireplace on which some wood had been placed ready for lighting.

"We'll soon have this place looking more comfortable," said Gif. "We'll get a good fire started, and then we can dry our clothing. In the meantime Jeff can go into the kitchen and stir things up there."

"How are you going to get a meal with the grub left behind?" questioned Andy.

"Oh, there's always something of some sort here, isn't there, Jeff?"

"Was last time I was here," answered the colored man. "We always left some stuff in the tin canisters and in some glass jars, so that the mice and rats and squirrels couldn't get at 'em."

Two lamps were lit, and then they lighted the fire in the big chimneyplace. Soon the flames were roaring merrily, and then the lads began to take off some of their clothing. Randy was glad to disrobe and wrap himself in a blanket from one of the beds.

"I can't help but think how close I was to drowning," he whispered to Fred. "It makes me shiver every time I think of it!"

"Don't mention it!" was the reply. "We've

got to be awfully careful after this, Randy."

"You bet!"

As soon as his guests had been made as comfortable as circumstances permitted in the living room, Gif went out into the kitchen to learn what Jeff was doing. He found the colored man building a fire in an old-fashioned cookstove which had been in use in the bungalow for many years.

"Ain't very much to eat, I'll tell you that," said the colored man. "Got a little coffee and sugar and some canned corn and some sardines."

"Well, I brought a big loaf of bread along and some crackers from that box we had," answered Gif. "We'll have to make out somehow. It's better than nothing. I'm thinking the storm will clear away by morning, and if it does we can get out early and rescue that stuff we left behind."

"Ain't no way to do," grumbled Jeff. "We ought to've stayed down to Mr. Mumbleton's place. If we'd have done that there wouldn't have been no accident nor nothin'."

"Well, we're here, and we've got to make the best of it, Jeff," answered Gif briefly. He was by no means pleased to think that the colored man had been "wished on them" by his father.

Gif returned to the living room, leaving Jeff to prepare the evening meal as best he could. He proceeded to take off more of his garments, hanging them where they might dry before the open fire. In the meanwhile all could hear the wind sighing mournfully through the trees that surrounded the big bungalow and hear the rain coming down on the roof as steadily as ever.

"Well, we're much better off here than if we had stayed in the woods, that's sure," said Jack, as he stretched out on a bench in front of the fire. "This will be fine when once we get settled and have everything to work with."

"I wonder if those other fellows got back to the Willoughby camp," mused Fred.

"I don't see why not. They started long before we did, and they don't have any snags on that side of the lake," answered Gif.

The boys could hear Jeff moving around the kitchen and they heard the clatter of kettles and pans as the colored man was preparing the evening meal. Then, of a sudden, they heard Jeff let out a wild yell.

"Hi! Hi! I's killed! I's killed!" roared the colored man. "Save me! Save me! I's killed!"

CHAPTER XVIII

AT THE BUNGALOW

THE uproar in the kitchen was so terrific that all the boys in the living room of the bungalow leaped to their feet in alarm.

"I's killed! I's killed!" roared Jeff. "I's stung to death!" and, with a clattering of a kettle on the floor, the colored man came dashing into the living room flourishing a frying pan in one hand.

"What is it, Jeff? What has happened?" questioned Gif.

"It's a snake! A great big long snake! Right on the shelf over the stove!" wailed Jeff. He dropped the frying pan on the floor. "He done stung me on the hand and on the arm! I's a dead man!" and he began to moan pitifully.

"What kind of a snake was it, Jeff?"

"Did he rattle?"

"Was it a blacksnake?"

"I don't know what he was! He was behind some old newspapers and magazines! I done put my hand up there to get down a salt-shaker and he

pushed his head out and stung me—stung me twice, right on the hand and on the wrist. I's a dead man! Somebody run for a doctor. If I don't gets a doctor I'll be dead before mornin'," and Jeff began to move around the living room, swinging his injured hand and moaning and groaning loudly.

Of course all of the boys were alarmed. They had had several adventures with snakes, some of them poisonous, and they knew that all that Jeff said might be true. On the other hand, they realized that the snake might be almost harmless.

Although they had left a large part of their luggage behind when starting on the walk through the woods, they had brought with them a shotgun and a pistol. Grabbing up the shotgun, Jack walked to the kitchen door.

"Flash your light in, Gif," he said, for the illumination made by the kerosene lamp in the kitchen was rather dim. "If that snake is still on the shelf a dose of shot at such close quarters will soon finish him."

With caution the two boys advanced into the kitchen of the bungalow. At first Gif flashed the light all over the floor, and especially in the corners.

"What about that thing over there, Jack?" he exclaimed suddenly.

"Only a dirty dishcloth," answered the Rover boy.

Having made sure that no snake was lurking on the floor of the kitchen, Gif picked up a broom that was handy.

"I'll shove the stuff off the shelf with this," he said. "If you see anything of the snake, blaze away."

"I sure will," answered Jack, raising the double-barreled shotgun and placing his finger on one of the triggers.

The others had crowded to the doorway to see what was taking place, leaving Jeff still moaning and groaning in the living room. The colored man was sure that he was going to die—that he had been poisoned.

Holding up the searchlight so that the rays fell full upon the kitchen shelf, Gif elevated the end of the broom, and then, with a quick motion, sent the newspapers and magazines flying to the floor at one side of the stove.

As the mass of reading matter came down some dirt and a small wiggling object not over two feet long came with it. Jack was ready to fire, but suddenly thought better of it and, leaping forward, placed his foot on the object.

"Just a plain little garter snake," he said, with

a laugh. "If I had shot it there wouldn't have been enough left to show Jeff."

"Maybe the big snake is among the papers," suggested Fred, who stood just behind Gif.

"We'll soon see," returned Gif, and with the broom he scattered the papers and magazines in every direction and with it a quantity of dust and cobwebs. But nothing in the way of a reptile appeared.

"Here, give me that snake," said Gif, after they had looked around the floor carefully. And catching the little reptile by the tail he snapped it into the air, almost severing the head from the body. Then, still holding the snake, he went into the other room.

"Here's the thing that stung you, Jeff," he said coolly. "Those stings won't hurt you any more than the sting from a good big mosquito. You ought to be ashamed of yourself for getting so scared over nothing," he added, a bit more sternly.

Jeff was crouched before the fire, rocking to and fro and moaning. Now he looked up with staring eyes at the little snake Gif was holding.

"Tha—tha—that ain't the snake what stung me," he faltered.

"Yes, it is, Jeff. We just got it out of that

bunch of papers on the shelf. There isn't another snake anywhere around. How this little thing got in and on the shelf, I don't know. Must have crawled in through some little hole in the floor or the wall."

"I—I—I'm certain sure it was a big snake what stung me," mumbled the colored man.

"Oh, Jeff, you're full of tacks!" answered Jack. "Go on back into the kitchen and look for yourself."

"A little snake like that couldn't harm anybody," came from Andy. "Why, a hundred of 'em wouldn't be any worse than a bunch of mosquitoes!"

Jeff looked rather sheepish. He examined his hand and his wrist, and then moved rather slowly toward the kitchen.

"I never did like no snakes," he said. "I had a cousin once down South got bit by a moccasin and he didn't live no time at all. When snakes is dangerous they's dangerous, and I don't want none of 'em around me."

"If you're afraid to go into the kitchen and get us something to eat, I'll go in there myself," said Gif sharply.

"Oh, I's goin'! I's goin'!" answered the colored man hastily. "We'll have supper in a few minutes. Ain't much to cook, as I done told

you before." Then he resumed his preparations for the repast.

Even when it was ready the supper did not amount to a great deal. However, the boys managed to make it do, and, thoroughly tired out, were glad enough to go to bed early.

As Gif had told them, the bungalow was a low, rambling affair. On each side of the big living room were three bedrooms and there were more bedrooms in the rear. Behind the bungalow was a long, low shed which, Gif explained, had occasionally been used for "the overflow" of visitors to the fishing club resort.

The boys decided that they would bunk together, two in a room, thus occupying two rooms on one side of the big living apartment and one room on the other. Jeff was to use a small room directly off of the kitchen.

"I's goin' to make sure there ain't no snakes in my bed," he announced when getting ready to retire.

The two fires had dried out the bungalow thoroughly, and, utterly worn out with their day's exertions, the Rover boys and their chums slept soundly until nearly eight o'clock the next morning. When they arose they found that the storm had cleared away and that the sun was shining as brightly as ever.

"This is something like!" declared Fred, as he went out on the porch of the bungalow and stretched himself. "My, what a pretty view!"

It was all of that, and the other boys came out to gaze upon the scene before they finished their toilets. They could look up and down the long lake for miles. In front of them were the pretty little islands known as the Cat and Kittens, all covered thickly with brushwood.

"If it wasn't for the islands we could look right over to the Willoughby camp," said Gif. "It's right in that direction," and he pointed with his hand.

"Looks to me as if we were going to have rival camps," was Jack's comment.

"I hope those Longley fellows keep their distance," came from Fred. "We didn't come up here to have our outing spoiled by Flanders, Sands and that bunch."

There was very little to eat for breakfast, and this being so, the lads resolved to go back along the path through the woods without delay and bring in the remainder of their luggage and other stuff left behind.

"You can come with us, Jeff," said Gif. "I want you to help us with the boxes of provisions."

"Don't you want me to stay at the bungalow

and clean up a little?" asked the colored man, who had no desire for anything in the way of strenuous work.

"No, you come along. You can clean up after we get back."

"Have you a long boathook handy, Gif?" asked Spouter. "You know, Randy and I want to rescue our handbags if we can."

"Sure! We'll take a couple of them along," was the answer.

It did not take the party long to reach the place where the two rowboats and their supplies had been left. They had covered the supplies with a raincoat and with some tree branches, and now found them in fairly good condition.

"What do you say, Fred, if you and I go back with Jeff and carry all we can," said Gif to the stout young Rover. "Jack and Andy can help Spouter and Randy look for the lost baggage and the missing rowboat. Then, when they get back, we'll have a good meal ready for them."

"Suits me," said Fred, and in a little while he and Gif set off in company with Jeff, each loaded down with all he could carry. This work did not suit the colored man at all, but Gif paid scant attention to his grumbling.

The other boys found it no easy task to locate the missing suitcases. They paddled around in

both boats for the best part of a quarter of an hour without success. Then Jack suggested that he undress and look around as best he could under water.

"Well, you take care that you don't get stuck the same as I was," said Randy.

"I'll be careful, don't fear," was Jack's answer. "I'll take one of the poles down with me."

He was soon in the water, and after diving several times managed to locate Spouter's baggage and fasten it to the boathook. Then this was hoisted up, and Jack went down again, and after another long search found the rest of the baggage.

"That's fine, Jack!" said Randy, when his suitcase came up. "I suppose everything will be soaked, but I don't know of much in there that the water will hurt."

"You'll certainly have to do over your neckties, and maybe your shirts," said Andy, with a grin.

"Oh, well, a little thing like that doesn't count," answered his cousin.

Having recovered the things from the bottom of the lake, the four boys set out on a search for the missing rowboat.

"The wind was blowing toward the east shore,"

said Jack. "Maybe we'll find it along there somewhere under the overhanging bushes."

They pulled around in one of the boats for the best part of half an hour, but without sighting the missing craft. By this time the sun was mounting in the sky and they were beginning to feel hungry.

"Guess we'd better get the other boat and go back to the bungalow and come out again after we've had something to eat," suggested Spouter. "It may take a whole day or more to locate that missing boat."

They were about to turn toward the other shore of Great Bear Lake when they saw a rowboat coming out of a cove just below them. The rowboat contained four young fellows, two of whom were rowing and the others taking it easy in the bow and stern.

"Must be some of the fellows from the Longley camp!" exclaimed Spouter.

"More than likely," answered Jack. And then, as the distant boat swung further out of the cove, he added: "And look! They're dragging an empty rowboat behind them!"

CHAPTER XIX

A QUARREL OVER A ROWBOAT

"THAT's our boat!"

"I think so myself. Come on. Let's row over to them before they have a chance to reach their camp!" cried Jack.

"That's the talk!" returned Spouter.

"I wonder if they got the oars," said Randy. "The pair I was using was dandy."

"It isn't likely," answered Andy. "You let them fall overboard, didn't you, when the boat upset?"

"Sure! Everything went out, as far as I know."

With each cadet at an oar, the four lads sent the rowboat through the water with good speed, and in less than five minutes were hauling up alongside of the other craft. Those at the oars proved to be Tommy Flanders and Billy Sands. The fellow in the stern, who was smoking a cigarette, was Paul Halliday, while the fourth lad was a stranger to the boys from Colby Hall,

although they had seen him in the Longley contingent at the ball games.

"Hello! So you found our boat, did you?" exclaimed Spouter.

"Your boat?" demanded Tommy Flanders. "Who said it was your boat?"

"I say it," answered Randy. "That boat got away from us yesterday in the storm."

"Did you find the oars?" questioned Jack.

"No. We didn't find anything but the boat," said Halliday. "And you've got to prove it's your property before we give it up," he went on suddenly and with a wink at his companions.

"That boat belongs to Mr. Garrison," declared Jack. "We got it from Mose Mumbleton only yesterday."

"Well, you'll have to prove that before we give it up," came from Tommy Flanders. "Don't you say so, fellows?"

"Sure we do," put in Billy Sands readily.

"Of course if it's their boat they ought to have it," came somewhat slowly from the fourth boy.

"Nothing doing, Fiddler!" cried Halliday. "We wouldn't take their word for anything. We're going to take this boat to our camp and they can't have it until they prove it belongs to them. For all we know, they saw us pick the

boat up and now want a chance to get it for themselves, even if it doesn't belong to them."

"Halliday, you ought to be punched for that!" cried Randy angrily.

"You know well enough we wouldn't claim the boat if it wasn't ours," added his brother.

"I don't know anything about it. If this boat belongs to Mr. Garrison he's got to prove property. Besides that, he ought to pay for having it brought back. If it hadn't been for us the boat might never have been found."

"Oh, so you're out for a reward, are you?" remarked Spouter sarcastically. "How much do you think you ought to have—a quarter or fifty cents?"

"I don't want any of your funny talk, Powell," roared Halliday, in a rage. "I'm not looking for any reward, nor am I going to turn this boat over to somebody it doesn't belong to."

"There is the name on the stern!" cried Randy. "*Comet!* That's the name of the boat we were in yesterday when we got upset on a snag. That's our boat, and no question about it."

"Well, we're going to take the boat to our camp. If Mr. Garrison wants the boat and can prove it belongs to him, let him come over there," said Tommy Flanders, after a few whispered

words to his cronies. Then those in the other boat began to row away.

"Great tomcats! we're not going to let them get away with our boat, are we?" gasped Andy. "Why, I'd fight 'em first!"

"So would I," declared Spouter. "That boat belongs to us, and they know it as well as we do. It's only a trick to keep us from having the use of the craft."

"Let's pull after them and cut the boat adrift," said Jack. "Andy, you get in the stern and have your knife ready. We'll show those fellows a trick or two."

"Right-o," answered his cousin, and without letting those in the other craft see what they were doing Andy got out his pocketknife and opened the largest of the blades. The others fell to rowing, and in a few seconds more were alongside of the rowboat which was being towed.

"Hi! Let go of that!" cried Billy Sands suddenly, and, reaching out over the stern, he tried to pull the second boat closer.

Andy, however, was too quick for Sands, and in a twinkling he reached over and cut the line. The loose end he caught in his hand and in a moment more the empty rowboat was tied fast to the stern of the craft occupied by the Rovers

and Spouter. Then Andy dropped back in his seat and grabbed his oar.

"Away we go, boys!" he chuckled. "I don't believe they can catch us even if we have got to drag the other boat behind us."

"Stop! Stop!" roared Tommy Flanders. "Stop, or we'll have the law on you!"

"You go to grass, Flanders," answered Andy.

"Don't you dare to follow us," called back Spouter. "If you do you'll be sorry for it."

"Oh, let 'em go. It's probably their boat, anyhow," said the boy who had been called Fiddler, in a low tone. "We don't want that boat. We've got all the boats we need."

There was a hot argument between this boy and the others from Longley Academy, and while this was going on the Rovers and Spouter pulled steadily and soon placed quite a distance between themselves and the other craft. Then, looking back, they saw Tommy Flanders and his crowd take up their oars again and row in the direction of Willoughby camp.

"What a nerve they had!" remarked Randy, as he and the others let up a little in their rowing.

"I'll bet if we hadn't spotted them they would never have said a word about the rowboat. That is, if they found out we had lost it," came from Jack.

"Just shows how mean that bunch is," declared Andy.

"They'll be meaner than ever after this, Andy. They'll want to square up with us for getting the best of them in this affair."

As the other boat was now well on its way to the camp on the east shore of Big Bear Lake, the boys from Colby Hall determined to turn back once more and take a look around for the missing oars. This they did, and spent an hour in rowing slowly up and down the shore and around several small islands. They were rewarded by finding two of the oars. What had become of the other pair was a mystery.

It was well toward noon when they got back to camp, and it must be confessed that their arms were tired and they were glad to rest a bit before partaking of the dinner prepared by Jeff under the directions and with the aid of Gif and Fred.

"What gall those fellows had," remarked Fred, when he heard the story the others had to tell.

"If they had kept that boat my father could have made it hot for them," remarked Gif.

"Oh, they wouldn't dare to keep it. They only thought they were going to make us a lot of trouble," answered Jack. "It was just a little meanness on their part, that's all."

All the boxes and bundles had been brought in;

and as soon as they had rested and had dinner Randy and Spouter set about emptying their suitcases and drying out their contents. Fortunately, nothing had been permanently injured, for which the lads were thankful.

Several days passed, the boys doing little except to go in bathing and lie around outdoors enjoying themselves. The bungalow boasted of several hammocks, and these were stretched between convenient trees, some of them quite close to the water. The lads went fishing, catching a fine mess of pickerel and perch, which they had Jeff fry for supper and for the following breakfast.

"Well, Jeff certainly knows how to fry fish," remarked Jack, after he had eaten his supper. "I never ate fish that tasted better."

"That's the one thing that Jeff can do," answered Gif. "Otherwise, I think he's about as lazy and worthless as any nigger I ever met. Privately, I wish we could get rid of him."

"You'd better pile more work on him, Gif. Maybe then he'd get tired of the job and make an excuse for going home," suggested Spouter.

"I'm certainly going to do something unless he wakes up," answered the other.

On Monday, following a quiet Sunday in camp, all the boys rowed up to Rocky Run to pur-

chase some additional supplies from Mose Mumbleton. The old storekeeper was glad to see them and had some news to impart.

"Three more young fellows came for that other camp yesterday," he said. "A fellow named Smith, another named Mason and a third chap with a big wide mouth, named Stowell."

"That was Codfish!" exclaimed Andy. "They said he was coming up here."

"Did they buy anything from you, Mr. Mumbleton?" questioned Jack.

"Oh, yes; a few things. But most of those fellows are terribly sharp at driving a bargain. I guess they haven't got any too much spending money with them. Another thing! Mr. Flanders was up here. He has a boy over to the camp. He's the man, you know, who bought that factory up on Flat Rock Creek."

"Is he staying up at the camp?" asked Andy.

"Oh, no. He was going up to a farmhouse that's quite close to the old factory. I think he wants to look the property over. He's thinking of opening it up again, you know."

"What sort of factory is it?" questioned Fred.

"Why, it used to be a paint works. What they're going to do with it now though, I don't know. It's a pretty good building, and I suppose it could be used for most anything."

After the storekeeper had supplied them with the things they wanted he told them they had better hang around a little longer as the train would soon be in with the mail. They waited as directed and were rewarded with a number of letters which, of course, they read eagerly.

One communication received by Jack was from Ruth. In it the girl declared that she was having a fine time with the other girls at Valley Brook Farm, but that she was very much worried over her father's business affairs.

"The loss of the book of formulas is worrying dad a great deal," she wrote. "Not only because he spent so much money on it, but because he got some of the money from Uncle Barney and because he signed an agreement to purchase a place where he could manufacture those artists' colors. And worst of all, the loss of the money seems to have revived that old quarrel between dad and Uncle Barney. Mother is terribly worried, especially as dad doesn't seem to be nearly as well as he was before that aeroplane accident."

The reading of this communication worried Jack not a little. He could see that Ruth was much downcast over the state of affairs.

"Everything all right, Jack?" questioned Fred. "Here's a letter from dad if you'd like to read it. Everything is O. K. down their way."

"Oh, they're all well enough up at the farm," answered the young major. "But Ruth has her troubles," and then he told of what the girl had written.

"It's too bad," remarked his cousin. "I wonder why Mr. Stevenson doesn't try to get on the track of those two men, Norris and Lemrech, the workmen who were interested in getting such formulas. Don't you remember they said Lemrech was of a shady reputation and not above stealing the formulas and that the other fellow, who was his cousin, was the same kind of man?"

"Well, Mr. Stevenson is probably trying to locate those fellows. But maybe they know enough to keep out of sight."

"If he shouldn't get the formulas back, Jack, it might bankrupt him."

"That's just what I have been thinking," answered the young major soberly.

CHAPTER XX

AT THE RIVAL CAMP

Several days passed and the Rover boys and their chums began to feel thoroughly at home in the camp at Big Bear Lake. The weather since the storm when they had arrived had been ideal, and they slept with all the doors and windows wide open. This aired the bungalow thoroughly.

Because of Jeff's constant worrying concerning snakes they had made a thorough search in and around the bungalow for such reptiles. Their only discovery was a nest of half a dozen garter snakes, not one of them over two feet long, under some rocks near the shed behind the house.

"I half wish we could find a snake three or four feet long and scare Jeff almost to death," grumbled Gif. "Then maybe he'd pack up and go home."

"What a pity I didn't bring that paper snake along—the one we used to scare Codfish with," answered Andy. "I might try that big imitation

firecracker on him, only he saw it the other day and saw that I was using it for a collar and necktie box."

During those days the boys went in swimming several times. They even got up a little race among themselves, which Jack won with ease, Spouter and Randy being tied for second place. They saw but little of the cadets at the Willoughby camp. Once they noticed several rowboats going in the direction of Beldane at the lower end of the lake, and with the aid of the fieldglasses Gif had brought along recognized some of the occupants.

"I guess they're going down there for their supplies instead of getting them of Mose Mumbleton," was Jack's comment. "I suppose they have an idea that Mumbleton is a special friend of yours, Gif, and that's why some of those fellows, especially Flanders and his bunch, don't want to trade with him."

"Well, I'm sorry to have Mumbleton lose the money," answered Gif.

"Oh, he won't lose very much," put in Randy. "Don't you remember he said they were very close at driving a bargain for what they wanted? They would probably like to have him sell his goods without any profit."

"I'd like to have a look at their camp," said

Andy. "What's the matter with rowing over to that side of the lake to-morrow?"

The others were willing, and they left directly after lunch on the following day, Gif first instructing Jeff as to what he was to do during their absence.

"I want you to clean up the living room thoroughly, Jeff," said he. "And then I want you to get a first-class dinner ready for us. We'll be back about six o'clock. Have those fish we caught this morning and some fried potatoes, corn, and see if you can't turn out some kind of nice cake or a pie. There are plenty of apples on hand for a pie."

"All right, I'll 'tend to everything," mumbled the colored man, but he looked anything but pleased at the prospect. He had come to the camp hoping that the boys would do most of the work and that he could take it easy.

One of the rowboats was considerably larger than the others, and the six boys piled into this, taking two pairs of oars with them.

"We can take turns at rowing," said Gif. "That will give each fellow a chance to rest. We can take our own time, too, because it isn't so very much of a trip."

"Let's row in and out among the Cat and Kit-

tens," suggested Jack. "I've been wanting to land on those islands ever since we came to the bungalow."

"You won't find much of a landing place, Jack. Every one of the islands is covered with brushwood to the water's edge, as you can see."

The boys rowed around the larger island and then in and out among the four which were smaller. As Gif had said, they found each of them heavily wooded and did not see a single place where a good landing could be made.

"If anybody wanted to build on any of these islands he'd have a job clearing the ground," was Spouter's comment. "Not a single spot where a fellow could run a boat ashore. You'd have to fairly fight your way through the bushes."

"That's what makes them so beautiful," said Fred. "I never saw prettier islands anywhere—not even over at Lake George."

Having gone around all the Cat and Kittens, they set out for the eastern shore of Big Bear Lake, heading for the cove into which the recovered rowboat had drifted.

"We might possibly pick up one or both of the oars we lost," said Randy. "I'd like to get them back."

"Oh, Randy, you mustn't worry about those

oars," put in Gif. "They were not worth a fortune, and we've got several extra pairs up at the bungalow, as you know."

Nevertheless, with plenty of time on hand, the boys spent the best part of an hour skirting the cove and looking into every corner where they thought the oars might have drifted. Once they thought they saw one of the oars, but the object proved to be nothing more than a sunken log.

"I suppose we might as well give it up," said Randy, after a while. "Let's go around to the Willoughby camp and see what those fellows are doing."

A row of less than ten minutes brought them in sight of the camp occupied by the cadets from Longley Academy. The little dock and the two small bungalows behind it seemed to be deserted, not a soul being anywhere in sight.

"Must have all gone off for the day," said Jack. "Well, I don't blame them for wanting to get away when the weather is so fine. Plenty of time to stick around camp when it rains."

"Shall we go ashore?" questioned Fred.

"Better not," came from Spouter. "If we landed and anything was found to be wrong afterwards they'd say we did it."

"Listen! I hear somebody calling!" cried Andy suddenly.

"It's a cheer! Somebody is cheering!" exclaimed Jack.

"I believe they're having some sort of a game," said Gif. "They're out in that cleared spot up the lake a bit."

"Come on! Let's row in that direction!" cried Randy.

They were soon at a point on the lakeshore where only a thin fringe of bushes and trees separated them from what had once been a pasture lot belonging to a small farm. Here they discovered half a dozen of the Longley cadets enjoying a game of baseball with two boys batting and the others in the field.

"There is Tommy Flanders," said Fred, in a low tone as they brought their rowboat to a standstill. "He's at the bat!"

"And there is Billy Sands on first, and Halliday is pitching."

"Codfish is in the field. There is the fellow they called Fiddler, too."

Flanders, who had just had two strikes called on him, now knocked a ball well out in the field and began to run to first base, and then back to home. Codfish tried to catch the ball, but missed it and went sprawling on the grass.

"Good work, Tommy!" cried one of the boys, as the runner came in.

"Hello! what are you fellows doing here?" came a sudden cry from the brushwood. "If it isn't the fellows from Colby Hall! What do you know about that?"

The speaker was a Longley boy named Bob Mason whom Jack and Gif knew fairly well. He had been tramping along the shore looking for a good place to fish. He carried a fishing pole in one hand and a can of bait in the other.

"Oh, we just thought we'd take a little row," answered Gif pleasantly. "We get tired of sticking in one place."

"I don't blame you," answered the Longley cadet. Then he set up a shout: "Hi, you fellows! Come over and see who's here!"

"What's that?" questioned Billy Sands, as the baseball game came to an abrupt halt.

"Here are the fellows from Colby Hall!" called back Mason.

"Colby Hall!" exclaimed Billy Sands. "What are they doing here?" And then he and the others forsook the improvised diamond and came crowding down to the lakeshore.

"Have you fellows been up to our bungalows?" demanded Tommy Flanders before the visitors could say a word.

"No. We haven't been ashore. We're just rowing around the lake," answered Jack.

"Huh! Spying around our camp, eh?"

"We have a right to look at it, haven't we?" demanded Gif sharply.

"Oh, you don't have to get on any high horse, Gif Garrison, just because your father owns that bungalow on the other side of the lake," cried Paul Halliday. "This is our side, and we want you to keep away from it."

"Oh, say, Halliday! what's the use of acting that way?" put in Bob Mason. "They aren't doing any harm. The lake is free to anybody."

"You can't tell me anything about that crowd, Mason. I know them better than you do," answered Paul Halliday sullenly. "I didn't leave Colby Hall for nothing."

"We left it as much as anything to get rid of that bunch," put in Billy Sands.

"They always want to pick on a fellow," came from Codfish. "They're as mean as dirt. I think all of the fellows here ought to make them keep away."

"We won't come near your camp if you don't want us to," answered Jack. "You can keep to your side of the lake and we'll keep to ours."

By this time several other of the Longley boys had appeared, including Ted Maxwell. Most of the crowd were of the Flanders stripe and apt to take sides against the Rover boys and their

chums. But Maxwell and Mason, on the other hand, wanted to be friendly.

"No use of getting hot about it, Tommy," said Maxwell to Flanders. "Why not have some good-natured rivalry? We might have some rowing races, some swimming races, and we might even get up a baseball game, six on a side—that is, if they would care to play with six men."

"You've got the right spirit, Maxwell," answered Jack promptly. "We'll go into any contest against you that you suggest. We'll row you or swim you or play baseball against you. Or we'll even shoot against you if you say so," he added, with a smile.

"That's the talk!" cried Mason. "Let's get up a few contests. This outing is getting awfully stale, anyhow."

"We don't want any contests with them," grumbled Flanders.

"Sounds as if you were afraid," put in Fred.

"Oh, I'm not afraid. But I like to pick my opponents."

"Well, we'll be ready for you any time you say," called out Gif, after a few whispered words with his companions. And thereupon he and his chums rowed away.

CHAPTER XXI

THE BIG BEAR

"I WONDER if we'll hear from them again," remarked Spouter, after the rowboat had gotten out of the hearing of the Longley cadets.

"We'll hear from them if Maxwell and Mason have their say," answered Jack. "Those two chaps seem to be pretty decent fellows."

"Maybe they'll shame the others into some sort of a contest," was Randy's comment.

"If they don't offer to do something it will show they're afraid," came from Andy.

"I'd like to play a game of baseball with them," said Jack. He had been very sorry not to be able to get in the games held during the school term.

"Gee! but wouldn't we give it to 'em though?" murmured Fred. "I'd just love to knock Tommy Flanders out of the box again!"

"They'd want us to get a full nine together, and I don't know how we'd manage it," said Gif. "With only six fellows, we'd have no outfielders at all."

"Oh, maybe we could pick up three fellows at Rocky Run or at Beldane," suggested Spouter.

"Well, we wouldn't need any outside fellows if we went into a rowing race or a swimming contest," said Fred. "They would be lots of fun, too."

"And we might get up some running races," suggested Gif. "There is a footpath all the way around the lake, so we could arrange to run to Rocky Run and back or to Beldane and back or any other place. It would be lots of sport—a race along a footpath through the woods!"

"Fine chance to trip over a tree root and break your neck," chuckled Andy. "Just the same, I wouldn't mind going into such a race myself," he added quickly.

The boys continued to talk the matter over as they rowed slowly along the lake front in the direction of Beldane. Then, when it was almost five o'clock, they turned to cross the lake at a point considerably below where the Garrison bungalow was located.

"There's a wide cove up yonder," said Gif, pointing with his hand. "Some day we'll have to go and explore it. The old hunters used to call it Big Bear Cove."

"That must be, then, where the bears hold out," cried Randy.

"I don't know much about that, Randy. Nowadays names don't seem to count for much. You'll go to a place called Rosedale and not find a rose in it."

"Yes, I once went to a place called Cherryville," said Spouter, "and so far as I could find out there wasn't a cherry tree anywhere around."

"How about Rocky Run?" questioned Jack. "Did any of you see any unusual amount of rocks around that place? I didn't."

"Well, let's take a look at Big Bear Cove, anyway," suggested Fred. "We've got lots of time. You can bet Jeff won't be in any great hurry about dinner to-night."

"More than likely he'll just be starting it when we get back," said Gif, his face clouding. "That coon certainly takes the medal for laziness. I wish dad would get rid of him."

Still taking their time, the boys followed the shore of the lake for a quarter of a mile more and then turned into the opening known as Big Bear Cove. Here there were a number of small islands, all as well wooded as the Cat and Kittens.

"Seems to me this ought to be a lumberman's paradise," remarked Andy.

"Not such a paradise as you would think, Andy," answered Gif. "You see, the growth is so thick none of the trees have much of a chance.

Consequently, only a few of them are of a size to meet a lumberman's approval. Many of them, too, are all twisted out of shape. There is one place back of our bungalow that is so thick it's known locally as The Barrier because the lumbermen and hunters have found it impossible to get through the thickets."

"Dandy place to get lost in, I'll say," remarked Randy dryly.

"What a grand—oh, what a sublime spectacle!" murmured Spouter, who was standing up in the stern of the rowboat looking around. "What a picture for a painter! Can't you see what wonderful water colors an artist could paint here? Just think of the inspiration he could get from yonder pretty inlet with those stately trees and those beautiful overhanging bushes. And then—Great Scott, boys, look!"

Spouter's flowery oration came to a sudden close, and, giving a gasp, he pointed up the cove to where a series of rocks jutted out into the water. On the rocks was a huge form which suddenly came up on its hind legs the better to get a view of what was beyond.

"It's a bear! A big black bear!" ejaculated Fred.

"A bear! A bear!" was the cry, and all of the boys fairly glued their eyes on the bear that

still remained reared on its hind legs looking out toward the lake.

"Oh, what a shot!" murmured Jack. "If only we had a gun!"

"And we didn't even bring a pistol!" groaned Fred.

"Nor a camera," put in Spouter. "Talk about a picture! Wouldn't it be a dandy?"

So far the bear had not seen the rowboat nor the boys. But now the gaze of the big creature suddenly shifted just as Randy and Fred dropped their oars into the water to row closer. There was a sudden snort of astonishment. The bear came down on all fours and in a second more the creature had leaped from the rocks and plunged out of sight into the brushwood behind.

"He's gone!"

"Wasn't he a big one?"

"No wonder they call this Big Bear Lake!" exclaimed Jack. "He was as big as any bear I ever saw in the Zoo."

"And just to think we didn't have a gun!" murmured Randy. "Oh, what rotten luck!"

"It's the old story of seeing the biggest game when you haven't got a gun," remarked Randy. "What do you think, Gif?" he went on. "Would it be worth while to row to the bungalow and get our guns and go after that bear?"

"I don't think so," was the ready reply. "We scared him so that he's probably a mile or more away by this time."

"Just the same, I think we ought to come up and hunt for him some time," said Jack. "We might be able to trail him through the brushwood."

"Oh, yes! let's hunt for him, by all means," cried Fred.

"What if the bear does a little hunting on his own account?" questioned Andy.

"You're not afraid, are you, Andy?"

"Oh, no, Fred. But when we go bear hunting we've got to be mighty careful. You know it isn't like hunting rabbits or squirrels."

"Oh, I know that."

The boys could not resist the temptation to row to the point of rocks where they had seen the bear, and they even went ashore to take a look around. They soon satisfied themselves that bruin was no longer in that vicinity.

"My! but didn't he look big when he sat up?" cried Fred. "I'll bet he was eight feet high."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that, Fred," answered Jack. "Just the same, he was pretty big for a black bear."

"I'd hate to have him rise up in front of me and hug me," said Spouter.

"I wonder if there are any other bears around here," remarked Fred.

"More than likely. It's very seldom that you'll find a bear traveling entirely alone. Most likely the mate of the bear is somewhere around."

At last the boys turned away from the rocky point and rowed out of the cove in the direction of their bungalow. They had spent more time than they had expected, and now found the sun setting over the trees to the westward.

"Gee, this rowing has made me as hungry as any bear!" announced Randy.

"Same here," answered Spouter. "I do hope Jeff has dinner ready."

"Some fried fish and fried potatoes won't go half bad," put in Jack.

"I told him to have it ready at six o'clock, and it's now half past," came from Gif. "I hope he hasn't burnt any of the stuff waiting for us."

The lads were soon in sight of the bungalow. As they came closer a smell of cooking mingled with a smell of something burning greeted their nostrils.

"He's got supper ready, all right enough," announced Gif.

"But what's that burning?" cried Jack.

"Must be something on the stove," returned Spouter. "Maybe he spilled something."

"We'll soon see," cried Gif, and as soon as the boat reached the little dock he leaped ashore, followed by the others.

As they hurried to the bungalow they found black smoke pouring from the open doorway. Rushing inside, they saw that smoke was coming from the kitchen.

"Hi, Jeff! what's the matter?" cried Gif.

To this question there was no response, and a glance around showed that the colored man was nowhere in sight. On the stove rested a large pan of fried fish and another pan containing fried potatoes. Both the fish and the potatoes were much overdone, and each pan was sending forth a volume of smoke.

"Confound him!" cried Gif. "He's let the fish and the potatoes burn! What do you know about that?"

"Better get them outside, Gif," answered Jack, who was close by his chum. "Here, give me that pan!" And, catching up a cloth, he caught hold of the pan of fried potatoes and carried it outside. Gif followed with the pan of fish. Other things were on the back of the stove, and these were likewise beginning to burn.

It must be confessed that Gif was thoroughly angry, and so were all the other boys. They had returned to the bungalow, each with a hearty

appetite, and now the expected dinner was burnt and worthless.

"I wonder where Jeff went?" questioned Jack, glancing around.

"He ought to have his neck wrung!" growled Gif.

"Maybe something happened to him," returned Spouter.

Hastily the six cadets started on a search around the bungalow. It came to an end almost immediately as Andy set up a low cry.

"Here he is! He's asleep!"

"Asleep!" snorted Gif. "The idea! I've half a mind to use a horsewhip on him!"

Andy had found Jeff lying in one of the hammocks. The colored man, bedecked in his big kitchen apron and wearing his cook's cap, was fast asleep and snoring lustily.

"I'll fix him, the black rascal!" began Gif, and started to rush forward when Andy suddenly stopped him.

"Wait a minute, Gif," said the fun-loving Rover, in a low voice. "Wait a minute! We'll give that coon the surprise of his life."

CHAPTER XXII

THE DEPARTURE OF JEFF

As has been mentioned before, some of the hammocks which the boys had slung were close to the water's edge. One hammock, put up by Randy, hung across a small stream that at that point flowed into Big Bear Lake. It was this hammock into which Jeff had thrown himself, probably while waiting for the lads to return.

"What are you going to do, Andy?" questioned Jack.

"Let him down into the brook. It will do him good," returned the fun-loving Rover.

"Now you are talking!" came from Gif. "Souse him good! He deserves it!"

Everyone of the boys was willing to teach Jeff a lesson, and the others watched with interest while Andy brought forth his pocketknife and commenced to saw away at the rope that held the hammock in place. All unconscious of what was going on, Jeff snored away as lustily as ever.

"It's going!" whispered Andy, a few seconds

THE HAMMOCK, WITH JEFF IN IT, STRUCK THE BROOK.

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later. "Watch him, boys, but get out of sight."

The others understood and quickly sprang behind the neighboring trees. Then Andy gave a final slash.

Crack! The rope parted. Splash! The hammock with Jeff in it struck the brook, sending the water flying in every direction. Then the colored man rolled over and the next instant was floundering around vigorously.

"Hi! Hi! Save me! I's drownin'! I's drownin'!" he bellowed. "Save me!" And then he began to flounder around worse than ever.

The boys could not resist the temptation to laugh, and suddenly they burst out in a roar, in the midst of which Jeff suddenly stopped his struggling and arose to his feet in about two feet of water and mud. He gazed at the broken-down hammock ruefully, and then his eyes wandered in the direction of those who were taking in the scene.

"Wha—wha—what's dis?" he stammered. "Who—who— How—how did I come in dat brook?"

"Jeff, what were you doing in that hammock?" demanded Gif.

"I—I jest been restin', Mr. Gif. Jest been restin' a minute waitin' for you young gen'lemen to get back," answered the colored man lamely.

"Just been resting for a minute!" stormed Gif. "You were sleeping as soundly as a rock and snoring to beat the band."

"And you let the supper burn up!" put in Jack.

"All those fine fish we caught, worthless!" added Spouter.

"Burnt up! Who says they're burnt up?" cried the colored man, walking out of the brook and stamping the mud from his feet. "I didn't burn nothin'."

"Yes, you did. Everything is burnt," answered Gif. "Just go and see for yourself. What are we going to do for dinner?"

Jeff started toward the back of the bungalow and then saw the pan of burnt fish and the other pan of burnt potatoes, both resting on the ground near the doorway. His face fell, but then, of a sudden, he turned around savagely.

"I don't care! I didn't mean to burn that supper up! You was so long comin' I jest thought I'd rest a minute. You didn't have no call to flop me into the water."

"You're lazy and good-for-nothing, Jeff," answered Gif sternly. "The best thing you can do is to get out of this camp. I'd rather do the work myself than have you around."

"Let him go," answered Jack. "We can do

the work between us. We've done such work before."

"I don't like it up here nohow," said the colored man. "They's too much to do with so many young fellows around. I'd rather go back."

"Then you go," answered Gif. "But remember, I'm going to write to my father and let him know just how lazy and worthless you've been here; and I'll get the other boys to write too, so he'll know the truth of the matter."

"When do you want me to go back?" questioned the colored man, after a pause. He was now just a little bit scared.

"You can go back to-night if you want to, or otherwise to-morrow. But if you stay here to-night you clean up this muss and clean those frying pans. And you get busy and cook us something worth eating, and be quick about it," returned Gif.

To this the colored man did not reply, but, taking up the frying pans, he disappeared into the kitchen. Presently the boys heard him clattering around among the kettles and pans and knew he was doing what he could to prepare another meal for them.

It took Jeff the best part of an hour to prepare another meal, and even then it was not as

good as the boys would have wished. The colored fellow was very sullen, and they could see that he was on the point of breaking out. Gif, however, gave him no chance, and suggested that he take the morning train at Rocky Run for home.

"How is I goin' to get to Rocky Run with my baggage?" asked Jeff.

"I'll row you over directly after breakfast," answered Gif.

"I'll go with you, Gif," said Jack.

During the night Jeff must have thought the matter over and come to the conclusion that he was in wrong, for he was up early in the morning and had an excellent breakfast awaiting the boys when they arose. He suggested in a roundabout way to Gif that he remain at the camp as originally intended.

"No, Jeff, I've made up my mind we're going to do without you," said Gif. "You're too lazy and shiftless. You get your things together and Jack and I will row you over to Rocky Run where you can get the train and go home."

The boys were ready at the appointed time, and much against his will Jeff proceeded to get his baggage into shape and then came down and got into the rowboat. In silence Gif and Jack

rowed him to Rocky Run, arriving there some ten minutes before train time.

"Now there's your ticket, Jeff," said Gif, after he had procured it. "And that's all." And thereupon he and Jack left the colored man at the railroad station waiting for the train.

"It ain't right," said Jeff sullenly. "It ain't right nohow. I came up here to have a job for the rest of the summer. It ain't right to send me off. You'll be sorry for it some day."

To this neither of the boys made answer. They wished a few things from Mose Mumbleton's store and they also wanted to know if any mail matter had come in the day before.

There were half a dozen letters, one from home, two from Valley Brook Farm, and several from their school chums.

"Hello, here's news!" cried Gif, as he read one of the communications. "This is from Dan Soppinger, and he says he and Fatty Hendry and Ned Lowe and Walt Baxter are on an auto tour and expect to pass through Beldane in a couple of days, and if we'll come there and show 'em the way they might visit our bungalow."

"Good!" returned Jack. "I'd like first rate to see those lads. It will brighten things up a bit to have them at the camp."

"Say, Jack! if those fellows would only stay over a few days it would give us a chance to get up a baseball match against the Longley bunch."

"So it would! We'd have our six fellows here and Dan, Walt and Ned. I don't suppose Fatty Hendry would care to play. He never was much at baseball."

"He could be one of the umpires. We'd probably want two—one from each side. That is, unless we could get some outsider."

"It would be better to have an outsider, Gif. They wouldn't be satisfied with our man's decisions and probably we wouldn't be satisfied with the decisions from their side."

"Well, anyway, we'll have to go down to Beldane and meet them. Then we can talk the matter over. Maybe, after all, Longley won't give us a match. You know how Tommy Flanders felt about it."

"Yes. But I think Ted Maxwell has more influence with the crowd than Tommy Flanders."

As before, Jack had a letter from Ruth. The girls were talking of returning to New York and then the crowd were to visit May Powell. Ruth wrote that her father was still somewhat sick and greatly worried over his business affairs and over the loss of his book of formulas.

"That certainly is a mystery, Jack," said Gif, when the young major mentioned the matter to him. "I don't see why he doesn't get some first-class detectives on the trail of those thieves."

"I suppose he has somebody on the case," answered Jack. "It's pretty hard, though, to do anything if you haven't got some sort of clue to work on."

"I think I'd follow up the Germans who sold the formulas in the first place."

"As for that, he is convinced that they were perfectly honest in the matter. I think the thing to do is to follow up those two other men they mentioned, Lemrech and Norris."

Having finished reading their letters and placing the letters for the other lads in their pockets, Gif and Jack procured such supplies as the camp needed, paid for them, and started down toward their rowboat. As they were stowing their supplies away they glanced along the lakeshore and were somewhat surprised to see one of the boats from the Willoughby camp tied up there. Then they saw Halliday, Sands and the youth called Fiddler talking earnestly to Jeff. They had been told that the morning train was late and would not arrive for a good half hour.

"I wonder what those fellows want of Jeff. They don't know him," said Jack curiously.

The boys from Colby were on the point of rowing back to the bungalow when suddenly Billy Sands came running forward, hailing them.

"What do you want, Sands?" questioned Gif, bringing the rowboat to a stop.

"I want to ask you something about this colored man," answered Sands. "He worked for you, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"Is he honest and all that sort of thing?"

"He's honest so far as we know."

"Pretty good cook, too, isn't he?"

"Sometimes. What do you want to know for?"

"Why, we're thinking of taking him up to our camp. We're tired of doing our own work."

"Well, you're welcome to Jeff if you want him. We're through with him. We prefer to do our own work."

"I see." Sands paused for a moment. "You say he's perfectly honest?"

"As far as we know."

"And he's a fairly good cook?"

"Yes."

"Hum!" Sands rubbed his chin reflectively. "Well, I think maybe we'll give him a chance. It's awfully hard to get anybody up here." And thereupon rather abruptly he started to walk back to his cronies.

CHAPTER XXIII

DEEP IN THE WOODS

Of course the other boys were greatly interested in the news that Gif and Jack had to impart when they returned to the bungalow. They found the other lads cleaning up not only the living room and the bedrooms, but likewise the kitchen.

"Now that Jeff has gone we're going to have everything in apple-pie order," said Fred. "Of course, we'll have to take turns at getting the meals and all that sort of thing."

"You can't imagine where Jeff is going," cried Jack, and thereupon related what had occurred at Rocky Run.

"Well, as far as I am concerned those Longley fellows are welcome to Jeff," was Randy's comment.

"I'll bet they get sick of him pretty quick," came from Spouter. "They won't like his laziness any more than we did."

Then Gif and Jack told about the possible visit from the other Colby Hall cadets and passed over the letters received.

"On a tour!" cried Andy. "What do you know about that? Some style, I'll say! I suppose they'll want to put up at the best hotel in Beldane."

"We'll have to have 'em over here, by all means," cried his twin.

"Sure, we'll have to have them over," answered Gif. "The bungalow is plenty big enough. And besides we were thinking we might get up a baseball game against the Longley bunch."

"Right-o!" cried Fred.

"And we'll wallop them good and plenty," said Spouter.

"Why can't we challenge 'em right away?" asked Andy impatiently.

"No, we'd better wait until the other fellows get here. They may not want to stay that long and they may not want to play in a match."

"Oh, nonsense! They'll play quick enough." Nevertheless, it was decided that no challenge should be issued until the other boys were on hand.

Now that Jeff was gone, the boys felt more at home than ever. They could do exactly as they pleased with no older person to interfere.

"Gif, you'll have to make out a regular schedule for us to follow," said Jack. "You're at the head of the camp, you know."

"Fiddlesticks!" cried Gif. "You fellows have

as much to say here as I have. This is an every-man-for-himself camp."

Just the same a schedule was made out, the boys taking turns in pairs at cooking while the others took turns at making beds and cleaning up generally. This schedule worked out very well, and while some of the things may not have been cooked as well as if the colored man had served them, nobody complained.

The boys had not forgotten about the big black bear, and on the following day all set out on a hunt. Each carried firearms of some sort, and they likewise took with them a substantial lunch, for there was no telling when they would get back to the bungalow.

"Now that Jeff is gone, I guess we'd better lock up the bungalow," said Gif. "We don't want any tramps or wild animals to get into it."

"What about the boats?" questioned Spouter.

"Oh, we'll leave them tied up. I think they'll be safe enough. We can put the oars in the house." And this was done.

Gif was acquainted with the path that ran along the lakeshore, and he led the way with the others following close behind. They passed through some heavy brushwood, and then made their way around and over a series of rough rocks.

"Say, this puts me in mind of some of the

climbing we did when we located that cave where those fellows had the German submarine," remarked Fred, referring to a time which has been described in detail in the volume entitled "The Rover Boys Under Canvas."

"Gee, but those were exciting times!" said Jack.

"Oh, we've had some other exciting times since then," came from Randy. "Don't forget our days down in Texas and out at Big Horn Ranch."

The six lads pressed on, Gif and Jack somewhat in advance and the others following more slowly. Spouter brought up the rear, for he was very apt at times to stop to view the situation.

"I never saw more beautiful views," said he, as he came to a halt at a point where the path overlooked the sparkling lake. "Every turn is beautiful enough to drive an artist crazy. I wish I could paint. I'd like to spend the whole summer doing some of these scenes."

"We've got to pay more attention to taking pictures, Spouter," answered Randy. "A nice collection of photos will give us something to remember this outing by."

As they walked through the woods they started up some small game, but did not attempt to do any shooting, not being certain in regard to the game laws. Besides, they knew that a shot would

frighten the bear if it was anywhere in that vicinity. They had small cameras along and occasionally stopped to snap a picture or two.

Presently they reached the rocky point where the bear had been seen. They approached cautiously, thinking that bruin might possibly be in sight. But nothing came to view.

"I bet this is a good cove for fishing," remarked Fred. "I'm quite sure I saw some fish stirring around over there just now."

"Well, we're not out for fish now," answered Gif. "We want to get on the trail of Mr. Bear if we can."

Leaving the point of rocks, the six cadets plunged into the woods, following a trail which they knew must have been made by wild animals. As they advanced they spread out a little to the right and to the left, always, however, keeping within sight of each other.

"We've got to do that," cautioned Jack. "Otherwise some of us may get lost, and it would be a serious business to get lost in such a thick woods as this is."

"It certainly is an ideal spot for wild animals," said Spouter. "I wonder if there are any deer here?"

"Sure!" answered Gif. "But whether we'll see any or not is another story."

"It wouldn't do us any good if we did see some deer," said Randy. "It's out of season to shoot them."

"That's true."

On and on went the six boys, deeper and deeper into the forest. The trail which was fairly well defined led up a small hill, and here they came to an opening from which they could see for several miles around.

"Here is a pretty good view of the lake," observed Spouter. "And see! There are some rowboats!"

"Wonder if they are the rowboats belonging to the Longley boys," remarked Jack.

"There is a motor-boat off to the north," said Randy. "I suppose that's one of the boats belonging to Beldane. I understand they have several of them up at the hotel."

Having rested for a short while on the hill, they took up the trail once more and plunged down into the forest on the other side. Here, after only a few rods had been covered, they found the trail spreading into three forks.

"Now, then, which fork shall we follow?" questioned Jack.

"Don't ask me," answered Gif. "You know as much about it as I do."

The six lads examined the three forks as best

they could, and after a brief discussion decided to follow that leading southward.

"There is no use of getting too far from home," said Gif. "As it is, we'll be pretty tired by the time we get back."

By noon the six boys were tired and hungry and perfectly willing to rest for the midday lunch. They had brought sandwiches, crackers and cake with them, and washed this food down with some water from a nearby spring. They took their time over the meal, and then rested for another half hour before resuming their hunt.

"Looks as if we were going to be skunked," remarked Randy presently, after they had climbed up the side of a rough hill and then down again.

"Don't say anything about skunks," retorted Gif. "That's one animal we don't care to hit."

"Oh, a skunk skin is quite valuable in these days," said Spouter. "Just the same, I think we'll leave those animals alone."

Several times they stirred up some rabbits and squirrels, and often came across some birds. Once they heard a covey of partridges whirring upward, but they were almost out of sight behind the trees.

"There must be some pretty good hunting here in the late fall," remarked Fred. He was sorry that they could not bring down some of the small game.

"Yes, it would be great to come up here when the season is open," answered Gif.

All this time the boys were keeping their eyes wide open for the possible appearance of a bear. But either there were no bears in that vicinity or the animals knew enough to keep out of sight.

"Gee! I'm getting dog tired," remarked Andy, about the middle of the afternoon. "If you'll ask me, I'll say let's head back for the bungalow."

"I second the motion," said his twin promptly.

All were tired, even though they did not care to admit it, and, coming to a small watercourse, they decided to follow this until they could once more reach the lakeshore.

"I think it will bring us close to the bungalow," said Gif. "In fact, I'm of the opinion it's the brook that flows into the lake right beside the house."

"You mean the brook that Jeff got his bath in?" asked Andy.

"That's it. Of course I may be mistaken, but I think it's the same brook."

It was no easy matter to follow the watercourse, because the bushes were rather thick on either side and they did not wish to get their feet wet if it could be avoided. However, they kept on steadily, and soon came to an open spot where going was a bit easier.

"What's the matter with one of us shinning up a tree to see just where the lake is located?" remarked Jack presently.

"That's the idea!" called out Fred. "Andy, you're the best monkey of the bunch. Let me give you a boost up this tree."

Andy was willing to go up the tree mentioned, and in a moment several of the others had given him a lift to the lower branches, and up he went hand over hand until he was almost at the top of the tree.

"We're heading in the right direction," he called down. "The lake isn't more than half a mile off."

"Can you see the bungalow?" questioned Gif.

"I can see something in the trees, but whether it's the bungalow or not I'm not sure."

"Look! Look!" burst suddenly from Spouter. "Andy, take care of yourself!" he shouted.

"What's the trouble?" came from the top of the tree.

"Some animal is there, on one of the branches just below you! I don't know what it is," was Spouter's quick reply.

CHAPTER XXIV

SIX BOYS AND A WILDCAT

ALL of the other boys were much surprised by Spouter's declaration that there was some sort of animal in the branches of the tree Andy had just ascended.

"What is it, Spouter?"

"Are you sure you saw it?"

"Was it a squirrel?"

"Couldn't be a bear, could it?"

"No, it wasn't a bear. It wasn't large enough for a bear," answered Spouter. "It was just about the size of a great big tomcat."

"Maybe it was a wildcat!" exclaimed Gif. "Wildcats have been shot more than once around here."

All of the boys rushed to pick up the firearms which had been dropped when they had boosted Andy up the tree. Then they began to circle the tree, looking up in all directions for a sight of the wild beast.

"What is it?" yelled Andy. And then he added quickly: "If you shoot, don't shoot me!"

"We can't see anything," answered Jack.

The boys on the ground were alarmed, but this was as nothing compared to the alarm felt by Andy. His weapon had been left behind, and so he was practically defenseless.

"There he is! I see him!" came suddenly from Randy. "There!" And he pointed to a branch on one side of the tree. There was a flash of a hairy body, a quivering of some of the leaves, and then all became quiet again.

"It was a wildcat!"

"That's just what it was!"

"Where did he go to?"

"Hi, you fellows!" cried Andy. "If it's a wildcat don't drive it up here!"

"Can't you break off a tree limb and use it for a club, Andy?" called out Jack. "Maybe you can keep the wildcat from reaching you, anyway."

The words had scarcely been uttered when with a catlike scream the wildcat suddenly sprang from one side of the tree to the other. As it passed through midair all of those below saw it plainly. It was full grown and had a pair of glaring greenish eyes and claws that looked exceedingly formidable.

Bang! It was Spouter's weapon that spoke, but the charge of shot passed below the limb on which the wildcat now rested. The youth had

been afraid to aim his weapon too high for fear of hitting Andy.

As the shotgun blazed forth the wildcat leaped to another branch of the tree. This brought the beast in full view of where Gif and Jack were standing. Simultaneously both boys raised their weapons and blazed away.

"He's struck! He's struck!" cried Randy, and as he uttered the words the wildcat came tumbling down out of the tree into some brushwood. Here the beast thrashed around for an instant and then crouched low as if for a leap at the boys.

"Look out!" yelled Jack. "He's going to spring!"

Then with a spitting snarl the wildcat made a leap. But as it did so the small rifle Fred carried spoke up and a bullet went straight through its head, killing it almost instantly.

"Is he dead?" questioned Randy, after the wildcat had fallen quiveringly on the dead leaves of the forest.

"I guess so," answered Fred. "But don't go too near, he may be only wounded."

All of the boys had been taught to load up immediately after firing, and now their first attention was given to their weapons.

"How about it? Did you hit him?" questioned Andy.

"Yes. He's as dead as a doornail," announced Gif, after a gingerly examination.

"Any more wildcats in the trees?"

"I don't know. But you keep your eyes open."

In a few minutes Andy was on the ground beside the others, and all surveyed the wildcat with interest. It was a full grown creature and had it had the chance might have done great damage.

"What shall we do with it?" questioned Fred. "I don't know that I care for it particularly."

"We might take it to the bungalow, anyway," answered Gif. "If we could take it down to Beldane we could get a bounty on it."

"A bounty?" queried Andy.

"Sure! They pay five or ten dollars a head for wildcats in this state. And they pay a bounty on bears, too," he added.

"Would we have to take the whole animal to Beldane?" questioned Spouter.

"I don't think so. I think the head and skin would be plenty. In some places all they ask for is the ears or the tail, or something like that."

The boys had learned how to take care of the game brought down, and now, after taking several pictures of the animal, they speedily skinned the wildcat, bringing the head with the pelt. The carcass they threw into the bushes.

"Well, we got something, anyhow," said Fred

with satisfaction, as they continued to follow the watercourse toward the lake.

"One fine shot you made, Fred," answered Randy.

"Fred, I don't know what I should have done if you hadn't brought him down," put in Andy. "He might have come to the top of the tree after me."

"Oh, I guess he was more scared than we were," answered the stout Rover boy modestly. Yet, behind it all, he felt quite proud of the shot he had made. It had been at close range and he had had to think and act quickly.

The relaxation from the intensity of the situation was felt by all of the lads, and long before the bungalow was reached they were in a merry humor, singing, joking and whistling loudly.

"I'll tell you what we might have done," said Gif. "We might have set a bear trap and used that wildcat for a bait."

"Would the bear go into such a trap?" questioned Jack. "I thought they didn't care very much for meat, especially in the summer time. I thought they liked roots and things like that better."

"We might have put some maple sugar in the trap with the meat," answered Gif. "Bears like sweets, you know."

The boys arrived at the bungalow about sundown. All were too tired for a while to do more than sit around and rest. Finally, however, they prepared themselves a simple evening meal, and almost as soon as this was disposed of one after another shoved off to bed.

"This is the ideal life," said Jack, as he was undressing. "A fellow doesn't have to have any appetizing sauce for what he eats and he doesn't have to be rocked to sleep."

"My dad always said that it made a new man of him to spend a week or two up here in the woods," answered Gif.

In the morning the boys took their usual plunge in the lake and after breakfast decided to take one of the rowboats and go up to Big Bear Cove and try their hand at fishing. Fred had noted a certain hole under some large overhanging trees where he was certain they would be able to get some pickerel of good size.

As they had done the day before, they took a lunch with them so that there would be no hurry about getting back. And this was just as well, because once they were at the fishing they found the sport so fine that they hated to think of giving it up. Each one of them caught both perch and pickerel, and one of the finny tribe landed by Jack weighed at least two pounds and a half,

while another, caught by Spouter, weighed almost as much.

"We'll have fish enough for several days," said Gif.

"If only we can keep some of them alive," answered Randy.

"Oh, I think we can. I've been fixing up that pound in the brook, you know."

The day was not without its surprises. Once Randy was standing on a small point of rocks and had what he thought was a magnificent catch. Suddenly the fish whisked around and before the lad could save himself he lost his balance and went into the lake with a big splash.

"Hurrah! Randy's gone in swimming with all his clothes on!" cried Andy.

"Don't let the fish pull you away," called out Fred gayly.

"Catch the pole! Catch the pole!" called Randy, as he came up to his feet and scrambled out on the rocks. "There goes the fish with my pole!"

Jack handed his own pole to Spouter and made a leap for the rowboat. Getting in, he sculled rapidly after the pole, which was being jerked along the surface of the lake. As he caught the pole there was a snap, and the empty line came flying toward him. What became of the fish they never learned.

After that things went along quietly for half an hour. Then, of a sudden, Spouter let out a yell.

"Hannibal's ghost!" he called out. "I've got the biggest fish yet! Gee, I can hardly budge him!"

"Play him, Spouter! Play him!" called out Gif. "Don't let him get away from you."

"I knew some whopping big fish were down in that hole," cried Fred. "Play him for all you're worth, Spouter!"

"I can't budge him," gasped Spouter. "Gee, what a catch!"

Spouter was so excited that all the others pulled in their lines and ran to where he stood close to the bent-over trees which lined the edge of that side of the cove. Spouter was trying his best to haul in, but without avail.

"Maybe your line is caught," suggested Gif.

"No, it's a fish. I'm sure of it," answered Spouter. "I felt it pull."

All crowded closer to give Spouter whatever advice and assistance they could. Even Gif tried to pull in on the line, but without avail. Finally, however, Spouter twisted the line a little to one side, and then up came the hook and attached to it what looked like the remains of an old hunting boot.

"Well, what do you know about that!" cried Spouter, in disgust. "Nothing but an old boot!"

"And I'll bet it was caught in between the loose roots of the trees," said Jack. And then there was a general laugh, in which even Spouter joined.

It was nearly five o'clock before the boys got into the rowboat again and started to return to the bungalow. They had fifteen perch and seven pickerel to their credit, and of this catch they were justly proud.

"We'll have one dandy fish supper to-night," said Randy, smacking his lips. "And we won't have Jeff here to burn it up for us, either."

"Yum, yum! I can smell the frying fish already," murmured Gif.

The boys took turns at rowing and soon reached the lake proper and then sent the craft flying in the direction of the bungalow. As they came close to the dock Spouter, who was looking ahead, set up a sudden shout of wonder.

"Hello! what do you know about this? The other boats are gone!"

"The boats gone!" cried Gif. "Are you sure?"

"Look for yourself, Gif. We left them tied to the dock, didn't we?"

"We sure did."

The two boats that had been left at the bunga-

low dock were certainly missing, and much mystified the six boys landed, to gaze around in bewilderment. But gaze as hard as they might, they could see nothing of the missing craft.

"Do you suppose Tommy Flanders and his crowd took them away?" questioned Jack.

"I wouldn't put it past them," answered Gif.

Fred and Randy had turned toward the front door of the bungalow. The key to this was hanging on a nail, and taking it down they unlocked the door and threw it open. As they passed into the house a cry of astonishment broke from them.

"Did you ever see anything like it before?"

"Who did this?"

"What's the matter in there?" called out Gif.

"Matter? Everything's the matter," answered Fred.

"They've smashed up the whole house!" added Randy.

CHAPTER XXV

WHAT THE RIVALS DID

The other lads lost no time in following Fred and Randy into the bungalow. They too gazed around in astonishment which readily turned to dismay and anger.

And the lads had good cause to be angry. Someone had crawled through a window and "roughhoused" the bungalow thoroughly. Hardly a thing had been left untouched. All the bedding was scattered around on the floor, some in the living room and some in the kitchen, and on top of this had been piled the furniture and all the cooking utensils. To add to the mess, books and papers were scattered in every direction, along with all their canned goods and such fruit and vegetables as they happened to have on hand. A side of bacon rested on one of the bunks and a ham was in the woodbox under some kindlings. At one end of the center table, which had been shoved into a corner, rested in a heap their supply of coffee and at the other end in another heap their supply of sugar. All of their plates, cups

and saucers were missing, as were also the knives, forks and spoons. All their extra underwear had been tied together and in knots.

"The Longley bunch did this—that's as sure as sure!" cried Jack, as he surveyed the scene.

"I think so myself," returned Gif. "Some muss, and no mistake."

"They ought to be hammered good if they really did it," cried Spouter.

"I'd like to take a horsewhip over them," came from Fred. "Look at that sugar, will you? And look at the coffee!"

"Well, anyhow, they didn't dare scatter it on the floor," put in Randy.

"That proves one thing to me," came quickly from Jack. "Tommy Flanders and his bunch didn't do this alone. If it was the Flanders crowd alone they wouldn't hesitate to make all our grub worthless to us. They would have scattered everything on the floor or thrown it into the brook, or something like that."

"I believe you there, Jack," answered Randy quickly. "Some of the better class of fellows must have been in this. They did it just to be funny."

It was all the boys could do to make their way from one room to another of the bungalow since each of the doorways had been cluttered up by chairs and benches.

"Nothing to do but to straighten things out," remarked Gif. "Some job, I'll say."

"Do you suppose they took the boats away?" questioned Spouter.

"I hardly think so, Spouter," answered Jack. "The fellows who did this acted half decently about it; otherwise a lot of the stuff would have been actually ruined. And that being so, I don't believe they really took the boats away. Probably they're only hidden."

"We ought to look around for the boats before it gets too dark," suggested Gif. "We can fix up things indoors any time."

"Suppose we divide the work," suggested Jack. "I and some of the others can fix up the house while you and the rest look for the boats."

This plan was carried out, and Jack and the twins remained indoors to do what they could toward straightening out the bungalow while the others went outside to hunt for the missing rowboats.

To rearrange the interior of the bungalow was no mean matter, for a large part of the furniture was heavy and they had to be careful first of all that they did not damage some of the canned goods which were scattered in all directions.

"We'll pick up the apples and potatoes and onions first," ordered Jack. "And then we can

go at the canned stuff and the meat and things like that."

"We'll have to find the lamps first," said Andy. "It's getting dark."

The hunt for the three lamps took some time. They were finally located, minus the chimneys, in the oven of the stove. The chimneys they discovered on the back of a pantry shelf.

"Fine thing to put those lamps in the oven!" snorted Randy. "Suppose we had built a fire there! That kerosene might have exploded."

"Yes. And anyway we'll have to clean that oven out. Otherwise it may have a kerosene smell to it when we try to bake something," added his brother.

Lighting the lamps and placing them where they might not be knocked over, the three boys set to work with a will and inside of half an hour had salvaged all of the eatables. Then they commenced to place the furniture in shape and picked up the bedding and their clothing.

"We'll have to air the blankets out and dust them off," said Jack. "They got rather dirty on the floor, I'm afraid. And the underwear will have to be washed—that is after we untie the knots."

"It's queer what became of all the tableware and knives and that truck," remarked Andy.

"Did you look in the woodbox?" questioned Jack.

"I did," came from Randy. "That's where I found the ham."

The boys took the bedding out on the bungalow porch and shook it vigorously. Then they left it on chairs to air while they made another search around the building for the missing table stuff.

They were still on the hunt when they heard a shout from outside. Running to the rear of the bungalow they heard voices up the little brook that at this point flowed into Big Bear Lake, the same watercourse they had followed when they had encountered the wildcat.

"Hello!" shouted Jack. "Have you found the boats?"

"Yes!" came from Gif.

"They're tied up in the trees!" explained Spouter.

Jack and the twins ran in the direction of the voices and presently came upon the other lads standing at the foot of a tall tree. Swinging from one of the branches of this tree were the two missing rowboats.

"Some job they must have had, to tie them up there," remarked Andy.

"Yes. And we're going to have a job to get

THE LADS HAD GOOD CAUSE TO BE ANGRY.

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'em down," answered Gif. "I think we'd better let it go over until to-morrow."

"I'm willing," said Jack.

"Now you've found the boats perhaps you can find the dishes and knives and forks and spoons," said Andy. "We can't get a trace of 'em."

All of the lads returned to the bungalow feeling that the boats would be safe where they were for the night. They straightened out the rest of the furniture and made up the beds and then started to get supper ready.

"I don't know what we're going to eat off of," remarked Gif. "We'll have to use tin pans and basins and kettle tops and whatever is handy."

"And we'll have to eat with our pocketknives and the kitchen fork," added Randy, with a grin.

"Well, anyway, I'm glad the grub isn't missing," broke in Spouter. "I'm hungry enough to eat a meal with my fingers."

They soon had some potatoes on to boil. Then they cleaned some of the fish and started to fry them and also made themselves a large pot of coffee. To the hungry lads the aroma from the coffee and the smell of frying fish were exceedingly appetizing.

"Makes a fellow feel like home—a smell like that," was Fred's comment. He was slicing some

bread which had been brought from Rocky Run on the last visit to the store.

It was a comical sight to see the boys try to eat their supper without any of the tableware. One used a pie plate, another a saucepan and still another an old frying pan. Andy used an overturned teakettle cover and his twin had to get along with the glazed bottom of a jardiniere which someone had once left at the bungalow. All used their pocketknives but Gif and Spouter, who managed to get possession of the bread knife and the smaller article used for peeling potatoes.

"This must be like life in the trenches," remarked Randy, while they were eating.

"I guess we're better off than that," responded Jack quickly. "Lots of times those poor fellows had to eat out of their bare hands."

In spite of the trick that had been played upon them all of the boys slept soundly that night. They felt that they would be perfectly safe in retiring without leaving a guard.

"Those fellows won't dare show themselves around here for a while," remarked Gif. "They'd be too afraid we'd pitch into 'em."

"They wouldn't hang around very long, anyway, if they saw us with our guns," added Fred.

"We'll have to pay 'em back for this little joke, Fred," said Andy.

"Of course. Just give me the chance and I'll show 'em what we'll do!"

"I think the best we can do is to say nothing at all about it," said Jack. "Don't let on that anything unusual has happened. That will keep them guessing."

In the morning the lads took their usual plunge in the lake and then Spouter and Fred prepared breakfast, it being their turn for so doing. While they were at this the others went outside, first to indulge in a little horseplay in the way of boxing and wrestling, and then to throw themselves into the hammocks which were handy.

Jack was resting in one of the hammocks and gazing upward when suddenly his eyes rested upon a couple of potato sacks swinging from ropes tied to the tree limbs above him. At once he set up a shout.

"Hi, boys! Here is some more of the stuff, I guess!"

"Maybe the dishes are in those sacks!" exclaimed Gif, as he came to view the suspended bags.

"We'll soon find out," was the reply, and Jack began to climb the tree while the other boys gathered underneath. Soon he was at the sacks and felt of them carefully.

"The tableware, all right enough," he an-

nounced. "I guess the knives and forks and spoons are here too," he added, after feeling around some more.

A long boat-line was procured and with this the sacks were lowered carefully to the ground. As Jack had surmised, they contained all the crockeryware, as well as the knives, forks and spoons. Not a single thing seemed to be missing.

"Quite a stunt, I must admit," said Spouter, "to hang those things and the boats up in the trees. We might have hunted around a long while if Jack hadn't spotted those sacks."

Directly after breakfast the boys made their way to where the boats had been suspended, and inside of an hour had the craft safe once more at the lake front.

"Now I guess we're all fixed," announced Gif. "I'm glad it was no worse," he added, with a sigh of relief.

"They certainly gave us enough work to do," grumbled Fred.

"But not as much as it might have been," answered Jack. "If Flanders, Sands and Halliday were in this they must certainly have been held back by some of the other Longley boys. Otherwise they would have smashed up stuff and scattered it in all directions."

"Maybe Jeff came over with 'em!" cried Andy suddenly.

"Possibly. But I think this is only the boys' trick."

The six lads were taking it easy that day after supper when they discerned a motor-boat coming up the lake in their direction. As the craft came closer several persons in the boat stood up and waved their hands frantically.

"Hello! who can that be?" cried Jack, leaping to his feet. And then he ran down to the dock, followed by the others.

As the motor-boat came closer there was a cry from across the water.

"Colby Hall, ahoy!"

"Why, it's Dan and his crowd!" ejaculated Fred. "What do you know about that!"

CHAPTER XXVI

THE BASEBALL GAME

THE coming of Dan Soppinger and his crowd filled the Rover boys and their chums with pleasure, and they did all they could to make the new arrivals feel at home.

"We got to Beldane quicker than we thought," explained Dan. "And there was a boatman at the hotel who said he knew where your bungalow was, so we thought we'd come right up instead of staying in the town over night."

"And you did just right!" answered Gif. "And we want you to stay here for a few days at least."

"And we want you to help out in a baseball game. That is, if we can have our challenge accepted," put in Jack. And thereupon the other boys were told about the rival camp on the other shore of Big Bear Lake.

"Gee, that will suit me!" cried Walt Baxter.

"I'd like to stay here. But don't ask me to play ball," puffed Fatty Hendry. "You know that exercise is too violent for me. I'm willing to root, but that's all."

"I'll be glad to play," came from Ned Lowe. "It'll be a change from touring. I get rather cramped sitting in the car all day. Since we started we've done nothing but ride, making a hundred and fifty miles or more a day."

"Maybe we can get the motor-boat fellow to take a challenge across the lake before he goes back to Baldane," suggested Gif. The man was still at the dock awaiting orders from the lads he had had for passengers.

"That's the talk! We'll send the challenge right away!"

The boatman was consulted and readily consented to leave the challenge at the Willoughby camp before returning to the Beldane hotel.

"We want you to put our baggage on check in the cloakroom until we get back," said Dan. "And take good care of our auto, too. You can come back for us next Monday," he added, after consulting Gif. And so it was all arranged.

In the letter to the Longley boys Gif explained about the arrival of the other lads and challenged their rivals to a game of baseball on their own grounds on the coming Saturday afternoon. If the challenge was accepted the cadets from both schools were to go to Beldane and there select an umpire.

The arrival of the challenge from the Colby

boys created a great stir in the Longley camp. Ted Maxwell and a number of others were in favor of an immediate acceptance, but Flanders and his cronies demurred.

"I didn't come here to play ball. I came to take it easy," growled Flanders.

"I don't want anything more to do with them," put in Halliday.

"You were willing enough to go over there and rough-house the place," came from Maxwell. "Why not be a real sport? If we don't play them, when we get back to school they'll tell everybody we were afraid."

A hot discussion lasting fully an hour followed. Then a vote was taken and eight of the Longley boys were found to be in favor of the game while only three were openly opposed. Thereupon Flanders and his cronies finally said they would play.

"And remember," said Ted Maxwell, "if you do play you've got to do your best."

"Oh, don't worry! We'll wipe 'em off the face of the earth," growled Halliday.

"You let me pitch and I won't let 'em get in a single run," added Flanders.

"I've got an idea," went on Maxwell. "We might make this game quite an affair. They've got a regular ball grounds down at Beldane, and

this week they're holding a drive for a hospital that's to be located there. Why can't we arrange to play at Beldane for the benefit of the hospital? That ought to give us a good audience."

"You'll have to talk to Gif Garrison's crowd first," said Bob Mason.

Then came the question of getting an answer back to Gif. On account of what they had done at the bungalow scarcely any of the lads wished to go over to the other shore. They were much surprised, however, when they landed to find that not a word was mentioned regarding the "rough-housing" that had taken place.

"It would be a splendid scheme to play at Beldane for the benefit of the hospital!" cried Jack. "That suits me exactly."

"Let's do it, by all means," put in Fred.

And thereupon three boys from each camp set out in a rowboat for the lower end of the lake to make the necessary arrangements.

As luck would have it, the ball grounds were not to be used on the following Saturday, and the local authorities were only too glad to have the exhibition game take place for the hospital's benefit. No admission fee was to be charged, but it was understood that during the game a silver collection would be taken for the benefit of the proposed institution. "And a silver collection

doesn't mean that you can't drop a bill in the basket," added one of the committee.

Some of the boys had their baseball uniforms with them, while others managed to either borrow or rent uniforms, so that on the day set apart for the game both sides made quite a creditable appearance. They had new balls and bats, and the Rover boys and their chums had spent all their spare time in practice.

As in years gone by, Jack was to pitch for the Colby Hall team, as it was called, while Tommy Flanders was to fill the box for Longley Academy. Fred was to be first baseman, with Randy at third and Andy in center field. Gif went to second and also captained the nine.

"You'll have to act as a substitute, Fatty, whether you want to or not," said Gif.

"All right," answered the stout cadet. "But please don't call on me. Finish the game among yourselves. I'll be a high and mighty rooter," and he grinned.

It was advertised around the lake that two well-known military academies would play a game of ball for the benefit of the new hospital and this brought to the grounds a large number of people, including quite a few automobile tourists. When the boys trotted out on the field they were greeted with applause.

"There are the Colby Hall boys."

"And there are the cadets from Longley Academy."

"Looks as if we might see a pretty good game."

The manager of the local ball team had consented to act as umpire, and promptly on time the game started. Longley was first at the bat and in a second more Jack found himself facing Mason.

"Now then, Bob, knock it over the fence!" cried one of the Longley boys.

"That's it, Bob! Bring in a homer first clap!"

Although he had not been on the Colby nine since the new rule concerning officers had gone into effect, Jack had not given up his baseball practice and he felt himself in excellent condition when he caught the ball that the umpire tossed to him. Then came the command, "Play ball!" and he gave a warm up-swing and threw the ball over the plate. Mason was on the alert and promptly knocked the sphere down to center field where it was stopped by Andy and quickly sent to first.

"He's out!"

"Hurrah! First blood for Colby Hall!"

It was a splendid beginning, but such a fine showing could not last. Before the inning came to an end the Longley boys had scored two runs, much to their delight.

"Now, Colby, show 'em what you can do!"

Although the left-handed pitcher who had battled against Colby Hall during the games at the schools was at the camp, Tommy Flanders had insisted upon filling the box and now he came forward with his usual confident air.

"Go at 'em, Tommy! Eat 'em up!" cried Codfish, who had been playing center field.

Flanders was on his mettle and it must be confessed that he did very well—so well, indeed, that the Colby boys were retired in that first inning without getting further than first base.

"Hurrah! That's the way we'll do 'em up!" shouted one of the Longley supporters.

After this the game went along without either side scoring until the fifth inning. Then Andy managed to get a single, followed by a double from Gif, and then came another single by Walt, and when the inning came to an end the score was a tie, 2 to 2.

"Some game, I'll say," said one of the men from the hotel. "Almost as good as the professionals put up."

"Fine young pitchers, both of them," said his gentleman friend.

After that the game seesawed along until the eighth inning, when the score stood 4 to 4. Both Jack and Tommy Flanders had pitched well, and

the support on each side had been almost flawless.

"Some game, I'll say," remarked Fred, as he came in to the players' bench. "Why can't all of us put up a game like this when we're at home?"

The only flaw in the proceedings had been when Flanders had been cautioned by the umpire for stepping out of the box when about to deliver the ball.

"You're mistaken. I didn't step out," growled Flanders, and became quite angry.

"You heard the warning," was all the umpire said, but the tone of voice was such that the Longley pitcher knew he must pay attention to what was told him.

When the Longley boys came to the bat for the last time their best stick men were to the front, and as a result they managed to get in two more runs, much to their delight.

"Hurrah! Six to four!" cried one of the Longley boys enthusiastically. "Now then, hold 'em down to another goose egg and the game is ours!"

"We've got to do something, fellows," said Gif earnestly. "Who is at the bat?"

"I am," answered Fred.

"Well, do your best."

"I certainly will," responded the stout young Rover, as he grasped the ashen stick and walked to the plate.

Two balls and a strike were called on Fred. Then the sphere came in just where he wanted it. Crack! went the bat, and the ball went sailing between first and second base. Away flew Fred, reaching the bag in a cloud of dust.

"Hurrah! A single! Now then, pile up a few more, fellows!"

Randy was to the bat next, and it must be confessed that he was just a bit nervous, for he realized that their chances of winning the game were slim. Nevertheless, after having a strike and two balls called upon him, he managed to land on the horsehide for another single, which took Fred safely to second.

Spouter now came forward and managed to dribble the ball down close to first base. He was put out, but Fred managed to slide to third while Randy reached second.

The next fellow to the bat was Ned Lowe. He knocked a pop fly, which the second baseman gathered in with ease.

"Two out! Now hold 'em down and the game is ours!"

"Hit it, Jack, hit it for all you're worth!" whispered Gif, as Jack came forward with his bat.

The major of the Colby Hall battalion did not answer. But he set his teeth and took a firm grip

on the ashen stick as he faced Tommy Flanders. A ball was called and then a strike, and then another ball and a strike. All those in the grandstand seemed to hold their breath for what might be coming. The game might be won or lost in a few seconds more. Tommy Flanders wound up with care and the ball came in just a trifle low. Crack! went the bat, and the horsehide sailed upward far into the left field.

"Run, boys, run! It's a two-bagger!"

"No, it isn't! It's a home run! Run!"

Fred, playing well off third, came in with ease and Randy followed almost immediately. Jack was racing down to second, and as he did this he saw that the fielder was still running to gather the bouncing ball. Up he tore to third and there hesitated for an instant.

"Go in! Go in!" yelled Gif. "You can make it, Jack! Run! Run!" And with leaps and bounds Jack came in over the home plate.

"Three runs! Colby Hall wins the game!"

CHAPTER XXVII

A SQUALL ON THE LAKE

Of course the Longley boys were keenly disappointed, especially as they had thought they had the game "sewed up," as some of them expressed it. Yet the contest had been a fair one and they could not find fault over the result.

"You win," said Ted Maxwell, coming up and shaking hands with Gif. "A good clean game."

"I was a little out of practice," grumbled Tommy Flanders. "I bet you couldn't beat us again," and he walked off in disgust.

"Now we've had a ball game, why can't we have a few races on the lake, or things like that?" suggested Spouter.

"I'm willing," put in Bob Mason.

"Maybe we'll send you a challenge to a boat race," added Maxwell.

"All right, anything you say," returned Gif.

After the ball game matters ran along smoothly at the bungalow for a week or more. Dan and the others who were touring left after having had

"the time of their lives," as Walt Baxter expressed it.

There were three rowing matches arranged, a match between two of the boys from Longley and two from Colby Hall, then a match for singles, and finally a match in which the six boys in the camp were pitted against six of their rivals.

"I hope we manage to do something in those boat races," remarked Fred one day, when the boys were tramping through the woods on another look for the black bear they had seen.

"Well, I think we'll have a good chance to win," answered Gif. "We won before, didn't we?" he went on, with a smile.

"I'll bet it made them sore to lose that ball game," came from Jack.

"We sort of paid 'em back for rough-housing the bungalow," remarked Randy.

"Oh, we've got to fix 'em for that yet," said his brother quickly.

From Mr. Mumbleton the boys had heard that a black bear had been seen on the lower eastern shore of the lake and they had rowed over in that direction.

"I think this is somewhere around the place where Tommy Flanders' father bought that factory," remarked Gif, after they had come to a halt to rest for a few minutes. "They said it

was on Flat Rock Creek, and, unless I'm mistaken, this is the creek," and he pointed to a broad and somewhat muddy watercourse.

"I don't think we care to visit any factories," answered Spouter. "I don't see why a fellow should build such a thing up here. It just spoils the scenery."

The boys spent the best part of the day in the woods. They had, as before, brought their lunch along and rested for nearly an hour after eating it. Then they concluded that they might as well go back to where they had left their rowboat and go home.

"What's the matter with rowing past the Longley camp? If we see any of the fellows we can ask them if they're all ready for the boat races," suggested Fred.

The others were willing, and in a short while came close to the camp of their rivals. Strange to say, no one was in sight, not even Jeff.

"Maybe they've gotten rid of that darkey already," remarked Gif.

"Well, I wouldn't blame 'em for doing it."

"Let's go ashore and take a look around," suggested Andy, thinking there might be a chance to play some trick on the boys who had "roughhoused" the bungalow.

"You want to be careful that they don't spot you, Andy," warned Jack.

They pulled into a little cove under some overhanging trees and then approached the camp very cautiously. Not a soul seemed to be about either of the small bungalows nor at the shed in the rear, and, growing bolder, the lads entered the nearest structure.

"Quick! Let's give 'em a dose of their own medicine!" exclaimed Andy, and in a twinkling they were all hard at work disarranging the furniture, clothing and the bedding and the entire contents of the kitchen. Then they hurried to the other bungalow.

"Let's cart the bedding out into the woods. We can hang it over some bushes," suggested Randy, and this was done with all possible speed.

Then Andy took all the spoons in the place and jammed them down out of sight into a big pot of salt. The forks he jammed down into a pot of sugar.

"I think that'll keep 'em guessing a little while," he chuckled.

Only one boat belonging to the Longley camp was to be seen, and after surveying the situation the boys managed to push this under the dock completely out of sight.

"They'll have to go in swimming to get that boat out," said Jack, with a laugh.

Having disarranged the entire camp to their satisfaction, the boys hurried back to where they had left their boat and pulled away toward their own shore.

"Here come a couple of boats now!" cried Jack presently. "I think they're the Longley fellows coming from Rocky Run."

They kept on rowing and presently the other boats came close enough to be hailed.

"We've been taking your friend Jeff down to the railroad station," explained Ted Maxwell. "We found he was no good—too lazy—so we shipped him."

"I don't blame you, Maxwell!" exclaimed Gif. "I thought you'd get enough of him before long!"

"How about the races?" called out Jack. "All ready for them?"

"We'll be ready when the time comes," answered another one of the Longley boys.

"How are you going to keep house without Jeff?" questioned Andy.

"Oh, we'll get along all right enough," replied Paul Halliday. "We made him put everything in apple-pie order before he left."

"And you'll find it in apple-pie order when you

get back—I don't think," muttered Randy in a low tone, and then the boats separated.

"I'd give a dollar to be on hand when they arrive home," said Spouter, with a laugh. "Won't they be mad?"

"Well, it's tit for tat," returned Jack. "They mustn't think they can trick us and get away with it."

At last came the day for the boat races. The Rover boys and their chums had practiced constantly under Gif's directions and felt that they had done all they possibly could to win.

"If only the girls were here to see these races," remarked Fred.

"Yes. And if only they had been on hand to see the ball game," returned Jack. And then his mind went back to Ruth and to her father and he wondered how Mr. Stevenson was making out about the stolen paint-making formulas.

In the singles Fred was victorious over Billy Sands and Jack came in ahead of Paul Halliday. In the doubles Spouter and Andy lost to Ted Maxwell and another of the Longley boys, while Gif and Randy won with ease over the lad known as Fiddler and Codfish.

Of course the six-oared race, which took place three hours later, was the big event. For this

purpose two boats which were almost alike were chosen and a course around a number of the islands was mapped out. Some men in motor-boats from Beldane were asked to act as judges and in the end the event took on quite a look of importance, many coming from all around the lake to witness the contest.

"Here is where we have got to win!" declared one of the Longley boys. "It will even up for losing that ball game."

"Well, we're going to win!" cried another, who was one of the best oarsmen at the academy. "If you'll follow my directions we can't lose."

For this race both crews had practiced carefully, and when they came out to the starting line each looked to be in the pink of condition.

The race proved a great surprise in more ways than one. The sun was shining, but there were heavy clouds in the sky and just as the race started it began to rain. Then the wind blew up sharply.

"Row, boys, row!" cried Gif, who was setting the stroke.

"Gee, feel the rain!" murmured Andy. "We're in for a ducking."

"Never mind; pull!" answered Jack.

All had caught the stroke perfectly and were doing very well. They did not hurry, for the

course was over two miles and a half long and they did not wish to tire themselves out before the finish.

Less than half of the race was over when the sudden summer storm broke in all its fury. There was a vivid lightning flash across the sky followed by a terrific crash of thunder and then came little less than a deluge, which sent many of the observation boats to the shore in a hurry.

"Gee, we're going to catch a squall!" exclaimed Spouter. And he was right, the heavy gusts of wind soon sending the whitecaps bobbing up and down all around them.

"Don't give up, boys!" shouted Gif, to make himself heard above the sudden roar of the elements. "We've got to win this race, storm or no storm."

"Here come the Longley boys!" exclaimed Jack, as they were rounding one of the islands. "Great Scott! did you ever see it blow so hard?"

The squall seemed to grow stronger by the instant, and the boys had all they could do to keep the boat from foundering. Nevertheless, they kept to their oars and soon saw the finishing line but a short distance ahead. Only the motor-boat with the judges was nearby, all other craft having hurried away to seek shelter.

Anxious to win the race, the Longley crew also

kept on. But they had swerved somewhat from their course, and now in trying to regain the proper position they suddenly shipped a big wave.

"Hi! We can't stand this!" cried one of the lads in sudden alarm.

"Pull! Pull!" yelled another. "We've got to win, I tell you! Pull!"

Then came another vivid flash of lightning over the lake, followed by a deafening clap of thunder. The shock was so terrific that several of the lads in the Longley boat were seen to throw up their hands and let their oars go. Then wind and waves hit the rowboat a smashing blow on the side and over it went, hurling the six occupants into the lake!

CHAPTER XXVIII

AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY

The rowboat containing the Colby Hall cadets had just crossed the finishing line of the race when the wind and waves hit the Longley craft, turning it over.

"Hurrah! We win!" shouted Andy, in keen satisfaction.

"Look! Look!" exclaimed Jack. "The Longley fellows are in trouble. Their boat has turned over on them!"

"Gee! we'd better row to the rescue," came from Fred, with a gasp. The strenuous rowing had all but winded him.

In spite of the wind and whitecaps, the six boys managed to turn the rowboat around and sent it in the direction of the other craft. They could see one of the boys clinging to the upturned boat while the other five were floundering around in the lake.

The catastrophe was witnessed only by those in the rowboat and the judges and others aboard the

motor-boat, for the downfall of rain was now so heavy it cut out completely the view from the shore.

The motor-boat started to the rescue also, and arrived at the scene of the disaster several seconds ahead of the Colby boys. The motor-boat people managed to pick up three of the lads in the lake.

"Save me! Save me!" yelled one of the boys, and those in the rowboat saw it was Billy Sands. He was throwing up his arms frantically. Evidently the race had all but exhausted him.

As the rowboat came closer Jack reached over and caught Sands by the arm, and then he and Gif pulled the dripping cadet over the gunwale. They then rowed up beside Bob Mason and assisted him aboard.

"My gracious! did you ever see such a storm?" spluttered Mason. "I never saw so much lightning in my life. I wish I was ashore."

"Help! Help! I don't want to be struck by lightning!" came in a bellow from the overturned rowboat, and now the Colby Hall boys saw that the fellow clutching the craft was Tommy Flanders.

Another flash of lightning now lit up the scene and the thunder rolled along from one end of the lake to the other. In the midst of this those on

the motor-boat hauled in Flanders and then came beside the craft occupied by the Colby Hall cadets and those they had rescued.

"Shall we pull you in?" questioned the man who had the motor-boat in charge.

"Perhaps it would be as well," answered Gif. "We're pretty well tired out from the race, and that wind is fierce."

"All right. We'll take you over to your dock. Here's a rope. Tie it fast."

"What of our boat?" questioned Ted Maxwell.

"We can either pick that up coming back or let it drift. I don't think you'll lose it."

Some floating oars were picked up and then the craft belonging to Mr. Garrison was hauled over to its dock.

"Well, you fellows win the race," said the judge of the contest, with a smile. "Some finish, I'll say."

"Won't all of you come into the bungalow?" asked Gif politely. "No use of starting out in this terrible downpour. It will probably let up in a little while."

"I think we might as well," said one of the men present, and everybody marched into the bungalow. Here fire was started, both in the living room and in the kitchen, so that those who wished to do so might dry themselves. Then sev-

eral pots of hot coffee were made and passed around.

"That touches the spot!" said Ted Maxwell gratefully. "I was quite chilled by that sudden bath after being all overheated from the race."

"I don't want any coffee," grumbled Tommy Flanders. "I want to get back to our camp." He had determined to make himself as disagreeable as possible.

"We'll take you over there as soon as the storm lets up a little," said the man who had the motor-boat in charge.

"It was a mighty nice thing for you fellows to do—to go to our rescue," remarked Bob Mason to Gif and Jack. "I'll not forget it. I'm sorry now that we came over here the other day and mussed things up."

"Well, I guess you got paid back for that," put in Andy.

"We sure did," replied Mason, with a grin. And then he added in a whisper: "Several of our fellows wanted to destroy your stuff, but Maxwell and I wouldn't stand for that."

The sudden summer storm stopped as quickly as it had begun, and before long the motor-boat departed, carrying the Longley boys to their own side of the lake. On the way the overturned row-

boat was picked up and also another one of the floating oars.

After the races the Rover boys and their chums settled down to enjoy themselves thoroughly. They felt that in the future the Longley boys would leave them alone so far as "rough-housing" the place was concerned.

The six lads were still anxious to get on the trail of the bear they had seen, and went out several times, but without success.

"We must have scared Mr. Bear out of his wits," said Jack. "Otherwise we'd find some trace of him."

"Oh, let's try it again!" cried Fred. And eagerly they set out one Monday morning after a quiet Sunday in and around the bungalow.

They started in the rowboat, going again to the eastern shore of the lake in the vicinity of Flat Rock Creek, for Mose Mumbleton had again told them that the bear had surely been seen somewhere in that vicinity.

"Maybe it's a different bear from the one we saw on our side of the lake," remarked Spouter.

"Well, I don't care if it is," answered Fred. "One bear is as good as another as far as I am concerned if only we can bring him down."

The boys tramped around the best part of the

morning and then sat down to rest in the shade of some trees and bushes while partaking of the lunch they had brought along. They were close to a footpath running along the edge of the creek that flowed into Big Bear Lake, and while resting after eating saw two men coming along the path talking earnestly.

"I won't take a cent less than five thousand dollars," one of the men was saying. "Flanders has got to pay that much or he don't get the formulas."

"If I had my say, Carl, I'd charge him more than five thousand," said the second man, a tall, thin individual with a heavy moustache.

"Well, five thousand is quite a sum, Tex," answered the fellow called Carl, who spoke with something of a German accent. Then the two men left the vicinity of the creek and took to a trail leading through the woods.

The six boys had heard every word spoken, and they gazed at each other in surprise.

"They're going to try to sell Flanders something for five thousand dollars!" observed Gif.

"Did you hear the names Carl and Tex?" ejaculated Jack. "Those fellows must be Carl Lemrech and Tex Norris, the fellows suspected of stealing that book of formulas!"

"Exactly!" cried Randy.

"I wonder if they've got the book of formulas with 'em," came from Fred.

"Let's follow them," put in Andy, in excitement.

"We will, Andy," answered Jack readily. "But listen! Perhaps it will be as well if we keep out of sight."

With caution the six lads followed the two men through the woods until they reached an old cabin which had long since seen its best days. They found the men inside smoking and drinking from a flask one carried. They were talking earnestly.

"This is Monday," said Lemrech. "I'll fix it so we can see Flanders here by Wednesday noon. We'll leave the book of formulas hidden right where it is and he sha'n't have a sight of it until he shows us his money. I wouldn't trust him to pay up if he had the book. He knows well enough we couldn't sue him."

"Oh, yes, you want to get your money first," answered Tex Norris.

After this the men talked the matter over for a quarter of an hour longer. Then there came a hail from the distance.

"There's that farmer who said he might give us board," remarked Lemrech. "Come ahead."

"We don't want to fix up the deal with Flanders at a boarding house," complained Norris.

"Oh, no. We'll fix it up right here. And I'll make the time Wednesday noon sharp."

"What do you think we ought to do, Jack?" questioned Fred, when the two men had departed.

"Don't you think we ought to search the cabin and see if that book of formulas is anywhere around?" questioned Andy.

"We might do that. But the chances are the men have hidden the book where we couldn't very well find it. I think the best thing we can do is to hurry to Beldane and send Mr. Stevenson a telegram to come at once."

The boys knew they could not telegraph from Rocky Run, as no regular office was located there. They hurried down to the lake and set off for Beldane without delay.

"I'll bet Mr. Stevenson will be surprised when he gets our message," said Jack, after the yellow slip had been passed in and paid for at the Beldane telegraph office.

"Going to wait for a reply?" questioned Gif.

"I think we might as well."

The boys hung around for three hours. Then came a message from Mr. Stevenson. It was to the effect that he would start for Big Bear Lake on the first train in the morning.

CHAPTER XXIX

JEFF BRINGS NEWS

THE Rover boys and their chums knew that Mr. Stevenson could not arrive at the camp before Tuesday evening. He would take the train to Beldane and would probably come up to the bungalow in a motor-boat. After breakfast on Tuesday time hung heavily with all of the lads. They took their morning bath and then knew hardly what to do, being somewhat excited over the prospect ahead.

"Maybe Mr. Stevenson will have a regular fight to get that book of formulas back," was Randy's comment.

"When he goes after those men and after Mr. Flanders he'd better go armed," said Fred.

"I intend to go with him if he'll let me," put in Jack.

"I guess we'd all like to go along," said Gif, with a laugh.

Not knowing what else to be at, Andy and Randy took a walk up the brook back of the

bungalow. They were gone about half an hour when they came rushing back wild with excitement.

"We saw the bear!" gasped Andy, who was all but winded from running.

"He's stretched out on some rocks sunning himself!" put in his brother.

"The bear! Where is he? Let's get a shot at him!" exclaimed Fred, and, leaping up, ran for his gun.

All of the others did likewise, and in less than a minute the six campers, fully armed, were moving cautiously up the brook in the direction where the twins had said the bear had been located.

"We don't want to make any noise," whispered Jack.

"Is everybody's gun in good condition?" questioned Gif, in an equally low tone. "We can't take any chances, you know; that bear may be a real fighter when he's aroused."

At this each of the lads examined his weapon, to find it in good order and ready for use. They moved forward in a bunch, each straining his eyes to be the first to catch sight of bruin.

"Now take it easy," said Randy presently. "Those rocks where we saw the bear are not over a hundred yards away."

"Come on! Let us circle a little to the south," cautioned Jack. "We don't want the wind to carry our scent. Some of those bears have a nose as keen as a deer, so I've been told."

As they advanced between the trees and around the rocks and brushwood the six lads carried their guns ready for instant use. If the truth must be told, each was anxious to get the first shot at the game.

"There he is!"

"He's coming this way!"

"Shoot him!"

Bang! Crack! Bang! went the shotguns and light rifles the boys carried, and the black bear, suddenly leaping from some rough rocks just ahead of them, was shot in the foreshoulder and in the rump. The beast emitted a loud roar, and then suddenly disappeared behind some nearby brushwood.

"Where'd he go?"

"Look out! He may jump out at you!"

Reloading hastily, the six lads circled the brushwood cautiously, each straining for another sight of the black bear. They could hear a low growl and saw some of the bushes suddenly move.

"Give him another dose just for luck," suggested Gif, and the six firearms sounded almost

as one as all the lads fired at the spot where they thought the black bear might be.

How many of the shots reached the mark they were never to ascertain. But evidently the bear was hit again, and with a fearful roar of rage and pain it suddenly burst from the brushwood and lumbered in the direction where Fred and Spouter were standing.

"Shoot him! Shoot him quick!"

Crack! went Jack's rifle and bang! came a report from the shotgun Gif carried. Then one after another the other weapons rang out and the black bear was halted when less than three yards away from Fred and Spouter. The huge creature, now on its hind legs, tottered from side to side and then came down with a crash at the foot of a big tree.

"Hurrah! We've got him!" cried Randy.

"Be careful! Maybe we'll have to give him a shot or two more," cautioned Jack.

The young major was right. The bear, a tough old fellow, was by no means dead. Though seriously wounded, it thrashed around and then did its best to stand up.

"I'm going to finish him," cried Fred, and before any one could stop the stout young Rover, he had run forward and sent a charge of buckshot

directly into the bear's ear. At once the huge creature rolled over on its back, gave a few spasmodic jerks, and then lay still.

For a moment after the end came the boys could scarcely understand what had happened. Then, as they realized that they had laid the big black bear low, their faces broke out into smiles and they shook each other by the hand.

"We got him! We got him!" exulted Fred, dancing around. "And look at the size of him!"

"Some bear rug there, I'll say," was Randy's comment.

"No bare floor with a bear rug like that," chuckled Andy, who even in such a moment of excitement had to have his little joke.

"Now the question is, how are we going to get this bear down to camp?" said Gif, after they had made certain the creature was dead.

"We might as well skin it right here," suggested Spouter. "No need of carting the whole carcass along. Why, it must weigh five or six hundred pounds!"

"We've got to have a picture of him," cried Fred. And several snap shots were taken without delay.

"We want some bear steaks for supper," said Jack. "We'll treat Mr. Stevenson to a surprise."

"Why can't we roll the bear over to the brook

and float him down somehow," suggested Gif. And after a good deal of labor this was done and they managed to bring the carcass to a point some distance behind the bungalow. Here they skinned the bear and cut out the choicest of the meat, chopping up the remainder and dragging it off so that the smell might not reach camp.

Fred and Spouter were trying their hand at broiling some bear steaks when they heard a shout from the other lads. Thinking that Mr. Stevenson had arrived, they ran to the front of the bungalow, to behold a rowboat coming in containing a single occupant.

"It's Jeff come back! What do you know about that?" cried Gif, in disgust.

"I suppose he'd like you to give him another trial, Gif," said Jack.

"Not unless he promises to do much better than he did," was Gif's reply.

"Well, to have somebody to do the cooking and dishwashing would help out a whole lot," said Spouter, with a sigh. Secretly he and the others were all tired of doing the housework.

"Good afternoon, gen'leman," said Jeff, as he bowed politely to the six boys. "Kind o' surprised to see me, I suppose?"

"We certainly are, Jeff," answered Gif.

"I's got a few days' work with Mr. Mumble-

ton, cleanin' up around his store and warehouse and doin' odd jobs at the boathouse," explained the colored man.

"I see," answered Gif briefly.

"Thought maybe you might be tired of doin' the work 'round the house," went on Jeff uneasily. "Wouldn't you like me to cook a first-class dinner for you? I'm jest achin' to do it."

"It's only your confounded laziness, Jeff, that made us send you off," answered Gif. "If you could get over that you'd be all right."

"It wasn't laziness, Mr. Gif. 'Twas the misery in my back. But that misery is done gone now, and I don't think it'll come back. And besides, I come here to tell you somethin'," went on the colored man earnestly. "I wants to tell you somethin' about some of them boys over to that camp yonder," and he pointed to the eastern shore of the lake.

"What have you got to tell us, Jeff?" questioned Randy.

"I thought it might be of importance to you young gen'lemen. It's about somethin' that happened at Colby Hall while you was there. But say, Mr. Gif, how about it? Don't you want me to get supper ready and clean up around the place?" questioned the colored man eagerly. "I don't like it nohow down to that Mr. Mumble-

ton's store. I'd ruther be workin' for real quality people."

"Well, we might give you another trial, Jeff," answered Gif, after a glance at his chums. "But remember, you've got to be right on the job. No more going to sleep and letting a good dinner burn up."

"No, sir! No, sir! Nothin' like that no more. That misery in my back is gone, and you'll find me wide awake," answered Jeff earnestly.

"Now what have you got to tell us about those fellows over in the other camp?" asked Spouter, impatiently.

"It's about a fire what done took place at the Colby Hall boathouse," answered Jeff, much to the astonishment of all the lads.

CHAPTER XXX

AT THE CABIN—CONCLUSION

"WHAT do you know about that fire?" questioned Jack.

"That fire was sot by three of them Longley boys," answered Jeff. "I done heard them talkin' about it one night."

"You did!" exclaimed Fred. "Who were the boys?"

"They was that Flanders boy and them two other fellows named Sands and Halliday."

"Tell us all about this, Jeff!" cried Andy eagerly.

Thereupon, sitting on the bungalow porch with the boys around him, the colored man gave the particulars. He said that he had caught the three boys behind the shed at the Willoughby camp smoking and playing cards. They were talking about old times and did not notice him when he went into the shed. He heard them mention a fire at the Colby Hall boathouse and, listening,

found that it had been caused by Flanders and his two cronies.

"I ain't sure that they done it on purpose," went on Jeff. "They went there to rough-house the place, same as when they done come here and rough-housed this bungalow. They had a lantern with 'em, and Sands said the lantern got knocked over accidental like. But Flanders didn't act much like it was accidental like and Halliday didn't neither."

"I guess if it was accidental they were glad it happened," cried Jack. "And one thing is certain, they didn't try to put out the fire. They just skipped out and let the place take care of itself."

"We ought to let Colonel Colby know about this," said Spouter. "It's too serious a matter to let go by. Of course, we could accuse Flanders and those other fellows, but what good would it do us?"

"Let's put it all down in writing and get Jeff to sign it," suggested Gif.

This was agreed upon, and the boys lost no time in taking down the colored man's statement. Then they read it to him and he signed it, and they put their names on the paper as witnesses to the signature. Then Jeff shuffled off into the kitchen of the bungalow to get ready for supper.

"I'll surprise you young gen'lemen, you see if I don't," said the colored man. "And I'll surprise that Mr. Stevenson, too."

"All right, Jeff," said Gif, "you can remain here just as long as you make good. The minute you fail in your duties you'll have to leave."

It was growing dark when the boys heard the put-put of a motor-boat coming from the lake, and soon the craft rounded a point of the shore and glided up to the bungalow dock.

"Hello, Mr. Stevenson! Glad to see you!" cried Jack, as he ran down to the dock.

"And I'm glad to get here," answered Ruth's father, as he leaped from the boat and shook hands. "Great news you fellows sent me."

"I certainly hope it proves all right," returned the young major.

"I'm impatient to learn the details," continued Frederic Stevenson. And then he went on: "How about it, Gif? Can you take care of the man who has the motor-boat? I thought we might be able to use that craft in getting around the lake."

"Sure, we can," answered Gif readily. "There are empty rooms galore in this place and we have plenty on hand to eat. We can give you a real treat to-night. We have some bear steaks."

"Good gracious! did you shoot a bear?" came from the man who ran the motor-boat.

"We sure did!" answered Fred proudly, while the others were shaking hands with the new arrival. "A great big black bear! And we got a wildcat, too!" he continued.

While Jeff was preparing supper the boys gave Ruth's father the particulars of the interview they had overheard at the old cabin on the other side of Big Bear Lake. Of course, the gentleman was tremendously interested and listened to every word with close attention.

"I believe you've solved the mystery of that disappearance," said he, after they had finished. "Now the only thing to do is to get hold of that book of formulas."

"Don't you want to catch Mr. Flanders when he tries to buy the book from those rascals?" asked Spouter. "It seems to me a man who would be mean enough to do that ought to be exposed."

"It's just possible that Mr. Flanders may be innocent in the matter," suggested Mr. Stevenson. "The other men may claim that they brought the book of formulas from Germany direct and that they have a right to it. However, it won't do any harm to listen to what the men have to say when Flanders appears."

During the evening the boys related what had taken place during their outing at Big Bear Lake and in return Mr. Stevenson told them something of what Ruth and the other girls had been doing, and of how matters were going with himself and Uncle Barney.

"If I can only get hold of that book of formulas I'll be all right," said the gentleman. "Otherwise everything will be at sixes and sevens."

It was an impatient crowd that went to bed that night, and they were equally impatient after breakfast in the morning, all wanting to see how the affair concerning the book of formulas would terminate. It was not until about ten o'clock that they started for the other side of the lake. They landed at the spot where the boys had been two days before and, leaving the boatman behind, followed the same trail leading to the cabin in the woods.

"Now I suppose we had better hide," said Mr. Stevenson. "If those men catch sight of us they may run away and we may never be able to catch them."

With great care they concealed themselves behind some brushwood and there waited for a long time in silence. Some of the boys were just about thinking that the men would never come when they heard voices in the distance.

"Here they are, I think," whispered Gif. And then Mr. Stevenson put his finger over his lips and all became silent.

Peering through the brushwood, Jack saw that two of the men were Carl Lemrech and Tex Norris. The third individual was short and stocky and his face bore a strong resemblance to that of Tommy Flanders.

"Oh, you needn't be disturbed, Flanders," said Carl Lemrech, in his German accent. "We got the goods. It's the same book that was sold to that man Stevenson."

"You'd better not mention names around here, Lemrech," grumbled Mr. Flanders.

"Oh, this is a very lonely place. Nobody ever comes here," put in Tex Norris.

Thus talking, the three men entered the cabin, leaving the door, however, wide open. There were two windows on one side of the building, and these were open also.

"I'm going forward to investigate," whispered Mr. Stevenson. "If I give the signal, jump out and point your guns at them. I don't want any of them to get away."

"Gee, this is getting real exciting!" murmured Randy. All the boys had brought their weapons with them, but more for a show of arms than for any thought of actually using them.

Mr. Stevenson crawled up toward one of the open windows and Jack and Fred could not resist the temptation to crawl up to the other. The three heard the men inside talking earnestly. Lemrech had made a demand for five thousand dollars and Flanders tried to cut this amount in half.

"No, sir, it's five thousand dollars or nothing," growled Lemrech. "Isn't that so, Tex?"

"It sure is! Five thousand!" answered Norris. "And we want it in cold cash, too! No checks or anything like that!"

"How do you know I've got so much cash with me?" demanded Tommy Flanders' father.

"Well, I told you to bring cash," answered Carl Lemrech.

"Let me see the book, so that I know it's all right," answered Flanders.

"You'll pay the five thousand in cash?"

"Yes."

Carl Lemrech paused for a moment and then, going to a corner of the cabin, removed a couple of boards in the flooring. From an opening below he took a heavy tin box. This he unlocked and brought forth a package wrapped in a newspaper.

"Here's the book," he said, as he unwrapped the package. "And I want to tell you, Flanders,

it contains the best formulas for making artists' paints that I ever heard of. You ought to make a fortune out of these formulas. You can manufacture those paints for artists in that old factory up on Flat Rock Creek and very few people will be the wiser. You can capture the market with that sort of artists' material."

The book was passed over to Flanders and he began to study it carefully.

"Seems to be all right," he said slowly. "Of course, I don't— Hello! what's that? Give me that book!"

Flanders broke off abruptly, for while he had been looking into the book of formulas it had suddenly been snatched from his grasp. Turning, he found himself confronted by Mr. Stevenson.

"This book is mine, Mr. Flanders," said Ruth's father coolly.

"Stevenson!" muttered Carl Lemrech, and turned pale.

"A fine piece of business you're in," went on Frederic Stevenson. "About to buy a book of formulas that was stolen by those men from me!"

"Jump him! Get the book away from him!" yelled Tex Norris, and made a leap forward.

But Frederic Stevenson had anticipated such a move, and as Norris came on he backed out of

the doorway, stuffing the book of formulas into his pocket.

"Up with your hands, every one of you!" he called sternly, as he produced a pistol. Then, turning to the boys, he added: "Don't let any of them get away."

All of those in the cabin had come to the doorway, and now they gazed around in bewilderment to find six young fellows in sight and each armed with either a shotgun or a rifle.

"I guess you understand the game is up," said Mr. Stevenson quietly. "All those young men attend Colby Hall Military Academy and they all know how to shoot. You'll be safer if you keep your hands up," and thereupon every hand in the cabin doorway was elevated.

It had been a quick victory, and now that it was over Mr. Stevenson and the boys hardly knew what to do with the three men. In the end, however, each of them was searched and disarmed, and then each had to submit to having his hands bound behind him. In this fashion all were marched down to the lakeshore and made to step into the motor-boat.

"See here, Stevenson, let us settle this matter," said Mr. Flanders eagerly. "It's all a mistake, I tell you. These fellows said you were trying to do them out of something that rightfully be-

longed to them. I'll give you a thousand dollars to drop the whole matter."

"Nothing doing, Flanders," answered Mr. Stevenson briefly. "You can tell your story to the officers of the law."

The three men were taken to Beldane where a complaint was lodged by Ruth's father. Then Lemrech and Norris were placed in jail, Flanders being let out on bail.

It may be mentioned here that later on Lemrech and Norris were tried for the theft of the book of formulas and each received a long term in prison. Then Tommy Flanders' father was tried for his part in the transaction, and it was only by the shrewdness of his lawyers that he finally managed to escape imprisonment. As it was, many felt that he was guilty and refused after that to have anything to do with him.

In the meanwhile, Colonel Colby took up the matter concerning the burning of the boathouse. Tommy Flanders, as well as Paul Halliday and Billy Sands, were terror stricken when confronted with the evidence against them. They, however, insisted that the fire had been an accidental one—that they had simply come to the place to "rough-house" it and perhaps to damage some of the shells. When the lantern had been broken and the scattered oil had blazed up, they had become

frightened and run away. Their parents paid for all the damage that had been done and there the matter rested. None of the three boys returned to the camp on Big Bear Lake, and Maxwell, Mason and a number of the others were glad to get rid of them.

"They are altogether too rough for our crowd," was Ted Maxwell's comment. "I wish they would leave Longley Academy."

After the excitement attending the capture of the three men and the exposure of Tommy Flanders and his cronies the Rover boys and their chums put in several weeks more boating and fishing, as well as hunting. They brought down another wildcat, and Randy had the satisfaction of bringing in the biggest fish ever caught in the lake.

"Some adventures we're having," declared Jack. But still more stirring times were in store for the boys, and what some of them were will be related in another volume, to be called, "The Rover Boys Shipwrecked; Or, A Thrilling Hunt for Pirates' Gold."

During those days Jack got another letter from Ruth in which she said she was very thankful that matters were being straightened out for her father and her Uncle Barney.

Then one day came a surprise for the boys.

Two motor-boats came in from Beldane and on them were all the girls, accompanied by Mrs. Stevenson, Mrs. Dick Rover, and Mr. and Mrs. Garrison.

"We've come to stay a week!" cried Martha Rover.

"And we expect you to entertain us royally," came from her cousin Mary.

"We'll do that, all right enough," answered Jack quickly, and with his eyes full on Ruth.

"We'll give you the best times ever!" exclaimed Fred.

"When you go away you'll say Big Bear Lake is as nice a spot as you ever visited," put in Randy.

"And you'll want to come here every year," finished his twin.

And here while the Rover boys and their chums are getting ready to give the girls a glorious time, we will say good-by.

THE END

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